

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**A STUDY OF STEPFATHERING: INVOLVEMENT AND
MEANING MAKING IN CONTEMPORARY STEPFAMILIES**

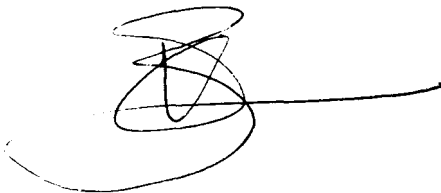
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SUBMISSION FOR AWARD OF Ph.D.**

2007



I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Abstract

Stepfamilies are complex and diverse. Until recently there has been little research that has explored stepfathers' perspectives concerning their involvement in stepfamilies. A number of fatherhood researchers have suggested similarities between stepfathers and biological fathers in the provision of nurture and care for stepchildren. This exploratory study was designed to develop knowledge and understanding of stepfathers' involvement in the care of stepchildren. In-depth interviews were carried out with thirty-five stepfathers. Stepfathers' involvement in stepfamilies, in terms of their care for and about stepchildren, was examined across a range of activities in different types of stepfamilies where the focus was on three sub-concepts of care: making commitments to, taking responsibilities for, and being sensitive to stepchildren's needs. Resources and constraints experienced by stepfathers were examined to identify how men shaped their identities through stepfathering.

The findings suggest three models of stepfathering; one group expressed the least clarity about their roles, and had little involvement in stepfamilies, a second group demonstrated a traditionally masculinist approach to parenting, and were 'moderately involved', with clearly defined roles for adults. Men in the third group demonstrated a pluralistic imagery of family life, and a more equitably gendered pattern of couple relations; they were actively involved in sharing the care for stepchildren with the children's mothers and non-resident fathers.

These findings are indicative of the caring potential of stepfathers, and of the potential benefits that involved stepfathering has for stepfathers, for their relationships with their partners, and for stepchildren. Policy makers may wish to consider providing support for men to share the parenting of stepchildren. In

so doing they may assist in securing better outcomes for children in stepfamilies, and encourage men to explore alternative ways of developing their masculinities in diverse family settings.

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2.9.2 Unsuitable enquiries and potential participants

Each potential participant who made contact with me regarding the study was initially screened (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and asked a series of questions to determine whether they met the eligibility criteria. If they did not, I thanked them for their interest and their offer to participate was politely declined. Several men who responded to the advertisements and notices were found to be ineligible by this initial screening conversation.

Of the potential participants who made contact with me, only two chose not to proceed to the interview following discussions with their partners.

A total of forty-seven men made contact with me or were contacted by me, of which nine were unsuitable and two refused to take part in the research, and one was discarded after the interview as it was only then that I became fully aware that he did not meet the eligibility criteria.

2.9.3 Ethical research considerations

It was an essential interview strategy that the stepfathers should be interviewed in an environment where they felt comfortable discussing personal, possibly intimate information, some of which they may not have discussed previously with their partner or with others. Each participant was advised that the interview would take approximately one hour and a half to two hours to complete. I discussed with them, in brief terms, the nature of the interview, that they were the focus of my interest, and that the purpose of my visit was to seek information from them about their experience of being a stepfather; other stepfamily members would not be interviewed. Mindful of my status as an

'invited guest' in their house, I asked if it was possible for a quiet room to be available for the duration of the interview. Each stepfather had control over the date, time, and the location of the interview. In the majority of cases (29/35), the stepfamily home was identified as the appropriate location. Other locations where interviews were conducted were a quiet corner of a pub (2/35), a stepfather's office (3/35), and the library at TCRU (1/35). The interviews were conducted during afternoons, evenings or at weekends, as was convenient for the participants.

Interviews conducted in stepfathers' homes occasionally provided the opportunity for me to be introduced to some of the stepchildren and to stepfathers' partners. Where this occurred, I was able to answer some general questions about the nature of the research. It appeared that arrangements had been made prior to my arrival, as no apparent discussion took place between stepfathers and their partners as to where we would conduct the interview. The participant and I either went to another room in the house or the other members of the household present at the time went to another part of the house. There was very little disturbance of the interviews once they were under way.

2.9.4 Informed consent

When arranging the interviews with participants, I provided them with two telephone numbers where they could contact me, and confirmed that they were aware that I was a research student at TCRU.

I began each meeting with an introduction to the research. I explained the purpose of the research, and assured each participant that there would be total confidentiality regarding the information they provided. Participants were assured that all the names of the adults and children involved would be changed.

I sought and obtained each participant's consent to tape-record their interviews, make notes during the interviews, and for the later use of their words in summary or as direct quotes (referred to under a pseudonym) in the written thesis at the end of the research project. I explained that once the interviews had been analysed and the research completed, the interview notes and tape-recordings would be destroyed. Having provided an opportunity for potential participants to ask questions, I asked participants if they were happy to proceed with the interview and provided them an opportunity to decline. No payment was made to any of the participants and the subject of payment was never raised either prior to or after the interviews had taken place. The majority said they were happy to contribute to research that was of interest to themselves and potentially to others. Each of the participants gave their informed consent.

2.9.5 The Data Protection Act

The Data Protection Act (1998) sets out firm guidelines that must be adhered to when any data are held relating to other persons either on computer files or on paper files. The Act stipulates that the person gathering the data does not become the owner of that data, merely a custodian. The ownership of the data remains for all time with the 'data subject', the person to whom the data refers. There are eight principles upon which the Data Protection Act is based. These principles relate to the ways in which information is gathered and used about the data subjects:

- data subjects should be made aware of the reasons for collection of data
- data subjects should be made aware of the ways in which the data will be processed
- data must be processed for a specific purpose
- data must be relevant and not excessive
- data must be accurate
- data should be retained only for as long as they are required
- data must be stored securely

- data must be protected from indiscriminate disclosure or transfer

In order to comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act, all tape recorded data and paper-based interview schedules that related to the interview participants were stored in a locked cabinet along with any back-up floppy disks of computer files that were on my home computer. My computer was password protected and the screensaver was also password protected. In any communication with agencies external to the university, and any public presentations within or outside the university, no individual participants have been identified; pseudonyms have been used throughout, and place names have been changed.

Although I did not discuss the scope of the Data Protection Act with the participants, I have sought to fully comply with the terms and conditions set out in the Act.

2.9.6 Conducting the research interviews

I was conscious throughout the interviews, as others have noted (see for examples; Dienhart, 1998; Gorell Barnes et al., 1998), of the privileged position I was in with regard to the participants and the inter-relationships that develop during interviews. Although I was conscious of the need to achieve my research objectives within each interview, I was also aware that the participants should regard me as interested in their accounts and attentive to their narratives. At the start of each interview I asked participants about the members of the household, their names, ages and their relationships with each other. I was careful to refer to family members by their names during the interviews, and sought clarification if participants confused names, dates, ages of children, or events. On more than one occasion I queried when participants confused the names or ages of stepchildren. I considered it important to allow stepfathers to tell their stories, which meant that at times I did not interrupt, but recorded aspects of information provided which related to different sections of the

interview schedule. At other times I sought to encourage participants to fully develop their accounts by asking probing questions.

I used the margin of the interview schedule to record contemporaneous notes throughout the interview. For example, I noted key dates or significant years that related to the birth of children, marriage, divorce, moving out or moving in. I also highlighted aspects I was interested in that had not been sufficiently explored before the participant moved on to talk about other aspects of their life. It was not always appropriate to interrupt the flow of the narrative. Referring to my notes, I was able to identify questions that I wished to return to, and to confirm information provided or to question further if required.

2.9.7 Concluding the interview/closure

At the end of the interview I asked participants if there was any topic that we had covered that they were unclear about, if they were uncertain as to why I had explored a particular topic, if they wished to ask any questions, if they were satisfied with the information they had given during the interview, and if there were any changes they wanted to make. All participants indicated they were satisfied and none requested changes to be made. I reassured them of the confidentiality of the data they had provided and thanked them for their time and support. I confirmed that I would not contact them again until the research was fully concluded, when I would provide them with a summary of the key findings. In many cases, participants said they enjoyed the experience and would await the opportunity to read the findings.

Samuel and Thompson (1990) indicated that it is important for researchers to be sensitive to the manner in which life histories are recounted. I anticipated the possibility that for some stepfathers, an in-depth interview such as this may

raise questions that they may have suppressed or not previously considered, and about which they may feel the need for further discussion after the interview. I carried with me some leaflets from the National Stepfamily Association, which I left with participants in case questions arose that I was unable to answer.

2.9.8 After the interview

Immediately after each interview, I reviewed my field notes and noted my impressions of the setting and situation, which I dictated on to the audiotape used during the interview. These impressions were descriptive of the location, the style or type of house, and also my impressions of the location of the interview (usually a room in the house) as I found it at the time.

Once I had returned home, or the next day, following the approach suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), I summarised key aspects of the data gathered from the interviews in the form of a 'contact summary sheet'. This consisted of a one page summary of each interview and identified features of the stepfathers' interviews such as: type of stepfamily; number of stepchildren; stepfathers' relationships with stepchildren: types of involvement-non-involvement; and other issues such as non-resident fathers, conflict with stepchildren, and relationship with partner (see Appendix IX).

The data summarised on these contact sheets served several purposes. They provided me with an overview of the data collection process throughout the period of one year during which the interviews were being conducted and prior to all the interviews being transcribed. They assisted in the preparation of and planning for subsequent interviews by re-focusing my attention to aspects of previous interviews that I had under-developed or insufficiently probed. Each summary sheet was subsequently attached to the front of the transcribed

interviews and ultimately provided an initial basis for preliminary data analysis once all the interviews were complete.

2.9.9 Evaluating the interviews

Following the procedure devised by Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) when interviewing men about sensitive subjects, I have sought to assess the quality of the interview process across the six elements they suggest: emotional accessibility, view of interviewer as counsellor, collaborative behaviours, declarations of comfort, detailed, dense, personal information, and narrative revisions (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002: 54). I believe I achieved a balance between formality and informality that resulted in the participants sharing some detailed and personal information regarding their private lives. None of the participants were aware of the questions I would ask prior to the interviews, and none expressed any anxiety during or after the interviews. However, some said that they would seek to explore further with their partners or stepchildren, some of the questions, which were raised during the interviews. Many wished me well with the research on the grounds that they hoped to learn from their participation and contribute to a greater understanding of stepfathers and their practices. For many, this was the first time they had spoken of their experiences as stepfathers. Bernard concluded by saying, 'I think you have been very thorough. I must say, I have said stuff to you that I haven't said to other people.'

2.10 Transcribing the interviews

Although transcribing all the tape-recorded interviews myself was a time-consuming process, I derived great benefit from this. I became involved in the interviews again from a slightly different perspective, and this allowed me to

hear parts of the conversations that I had missed at the time, because I was making notes, or thinking about follow-up questions. In this way the interviews became even richer as data sources, and I could listen to different emphases in speech, pauses, and other auditory cues, for example; 'ehm..', 'aah..', 'good question...', 'had not thought of that...' Listening to the tapes also provided me with the opportunity to cross-reference my field notes with the spoken word and with the transcript. I transcribed all the interviews verbatim and included references as appropriate to the non-verbal cues such as when one participant snapped his fingers to indicate how easy it was for him to achieve something, and when participants laughed, sighed, or were contemplative. These were either captured on the tape-recordings, or were noted in my field notes at the time.

2.11 Reflections on interviewing stepfathers

As a male researcher where all the participants were also male and in relationships with female partners, I did not anticipate any issues arising during or after the interviews of the nature referred to by O'Brien (1984) in her study of lone fathers. O'Brien found that gender had played a distinct part in her interviewer-interviewee relations. In several cases she found that she was a welcome visitor; some men 'wanted a woman to talk to, they were lonely, wifeless and felt deprived of female company so that a female visitor was a great treat' (O'Brien, 1984: 543). On most occasions I was offered a cup of coffee or tea when I arrived. I always accepted these offers and regarded this as an 'ice-breaker' opportunity, and as part of a preliminary conversation prior to the formal interview beginning. Where the interviews were conducted in locations other than the participant's home, I either made or bought drinks for both the participant and myself.

I was conscious of the male-male interview relations, and was keen to present, and conduct myself in a manner that I hoped my participants would find non-threatening. As the majority of interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, I was entering into their domain. I was mindful of this relationship in all my interactions with participants. I always sought to be punctual. I dressed in casual trousers, open-necked shirt, and wore either a coat or a jacket, and carried the tape-recorder, paper, pens and spare batteries in a carrier bag. Where I drove to appointments, I never parked my car in the participant's drive, I always parked a little way off from the location and walked to the address. When I arrived at the participants' homes, they conducted me to the room they had chosen for the interviews, and in all cases these were appropriate. I then said that I would take a few minutes to set up my equipment. In doing so, I always ran the tape recorder on new batteries and never assumed nor asked to plug the tape recorder into the respondent's electricity supply, unless invited to, and only where there was a suitable socket in reach of the tape recorder's lead. Once the participant was seated, I conducted a sound check on the tape to confirm that the recording was clear, and also to indicate that the interview was about to commence, and re-confirmed their consent to the interviews. I believe that my conduct throughout was appropriate; none of the interviews were terminated prematurely by the participants, at no stage during or after the interviews was consent for any information that had been given withdrawn, and none of the participants sought to withdraw from the research project.

Once the participants began to talk about their lives, I found little difficulty in being able to explore more deeply their personal and family circumstances, their anxieties and wishes for the future. Although I was not a stepfather, nor did I have children of my own, I had read relevant literature and researched stepchildren prior to this project. I had also taught successfully for several years in further education in a borough of South London, and felt that I had a grasp of

some of the complex family issues that many of my students had expressed over the years. These included, growing up in lone-parent families or stepfamilies, relating to father absence, stepfathers and other father figures in their lives, or of being teenage parents themselves. Thus, I felt I came to the interviews with some knowledge of the issues that stepfathers might experience. I had some understanding of the impact of family complexity and family transition on family relationships, and was able to empathise with stepfathers regarding their experiences. I also felt that as my personal and family circumstances were different from those of the participants, I was sufficiently distanced from their experiences to be able to view the interview data with an objective eye.

2.12 Chapter summary

Within this chapter I have set out the aims of the study and the research questions to be answered. I have discussed the research design that would meet these aims, and outlined the methodological approaches I adopted in order to undertake the study. The analyses of the pilot studies informed the interview schedule upon which all thirty-five interviews were based. In addition I used the Dyadic Satisfaction as an assessment of stepfathers' perceptions of their relationship quality with their partners.

I have discussed the approaches adopted in order to identify suitable participants to take part in the study. From initial contact with stepfathers, I was conscious of the need to conduct myself in an ethical manner out of respect for the participants, for their privacy, having due regard for the information they were providing, and the privileged position that I was in as a recipient and custodian of this information. The informed consent of the participants was sought and confirmed prior to the commencement of each interview. All the information obtained was maintained, protected, stored and used within the

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guidelines of the Data Protection Act. I sought at all times to prioritise the wishes of the participants with regard to meeting them at locations and times that were most suitable to them. It was clear from the conversations with these men that they felt at ease talking to me about their experiences.

Personally transcribing all the interviews had several benefits. I maintained the commitment to privacy that I made to the participants, this provided me with the opportunity to listen to the interviews in a completely different light, and permitted preliminary cross-checking of specific detailed information.

In the following chapter I will describe the process and procedures that I used in order to analyse these participants' accounts.

3 Data analysis

3.1 Introduction

Within this chapter I will outline the process of developing an analytical framework, the analytical procedure, and I will outline the objectives of moving from a thematic analysis to an analysis of cases. I will also refer to the procedures that I followed in substantiating the quality of the data analysis. I will then outline my search for, and the development of, a conceptual framework. Since the sample was small, purposive, acquired voluntarily (as described in Chapter 2), and was not representative of stepfathers in the population, it is not possible to generalise from the findings in a statistical sense.

The accounts provided by the participants were about the everyday, and the life experiences of these particular stepfathers. As such they were subjective accounts of the reality of their lives and their perspectives of the social processes that they had experienced. Mishler (1986), states that participants' descriptions and perceptions of their experiences are a means by which the insider's view of the lived world can be discovered. In line with other qualitative approaches, I anticipated being able to focus on developing an understanding of the subjective meanings of those specific stepfather's experiences. For example, referring to their recent stepfamily study, Ribbens McCarthy and colleagues explained that adopting such an approach was essential

if we are to understand the meanings and values that people attach to certain activities, interactions and behaviours, and the variety of ways in which they accept, reject, transform and/or ignore public discourses in their everyday lives and (step) family practices (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003: 18).

Analysing qualitative data requires close examination of the extensive range and breadth of material obtained during the course of the interviews in order to seek answers to the research questions posed. The thirty-five interviews produced a large amount of data. Once transcribed, each interview averaged 30 pages and 10,000 words. Although the interviews were subject to some quantitative analysis, the majority of the focus of the analyses was qualitative. The main form of analysis was a content analysis of themes identified both from the literature and from within the data. Data were subsequently analysed at a case level. The analytic strategy applied to data in this study was mainly one of deductive logic, using social theoretical perspectives located within the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 1, and inductive logic from evidence obtained from participants' accounts of their experiences as stepfathers.

3.2 Analytical framework

My aims for the data analysis were modest. I sought to examine the meanings that men attached to the activities they were involved in through becoming stepfathers and caring for other people's children. Therefore the framework adopted follows that of the 'interactive model' suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984: 23). They stress that the process of qualitative data analysis is not linear, and emphasis is placed on an iterative process where analysis moves from data collection through data reduction and data display to drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Dey (1993) explains the interdependence of the qualitative analytic process as one that commences with reading and annotating data so that categories may be anticipated or identified, and connections can then be made that link elements of the data. These initial links between categories are subsequently reviewed; in so doing the

data may be subject to further reading and analysis prior to producing the account.

Thus, the core of qualitative analysis lies in three related processes: describing phenomena; classifying; and examining how the concepts interconnect. Citing Denzin (1978), Dey suggests that thorough description encompasses the context of action, the intentions of the actor and the processes in which action is embedded. Bryman and Burgess (1994) state that classifying the data into appropriate categories or subgroups permits a number of analytical activities to occur, for example identification of differences in the data, and allowing meaningful comparisons to be made between groups of individuals assigned to different categories, facilitates the elucidation of relationships among concepts, and assists with creating a conceptual framework. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest a range of analytical techniques such as rearranging the data, placing the evidence in a matrix of categories, creating flowcharts or data displays, tabulating the frequency of different events, and examining the relationships between variables (see XI for examples). According to Dey (1993), categories must have two aspects: 'an internal aspect, they must be meaningful in relation to the data, [and] they must be meaningful to other categories' (Dey, 1993: 96). Dey also suggests that categories can often best be created based on distinctions in the data that are recognised or used by the research participants and which can be interpreted in a meaningful way by the analyst.

I have sought to apply and to follow these suggested analytic procedures in analysing the interview data. In so doing I have been mindful to retain the voices of the participants through the inclusion of direct quotations in the presentation of the findings. In particular, when creating stepfathering categories (Chapter 7), I have sought to underpin these categories with a case study, which is illustrative of each category (see Section 3.5).

3.3 The analytic procedure

In order to carry out the data analysis I considered using a computer-aided qualitative data analysis package such as NUDIST, Ethnograph or N-vivo. The advantage of these programs is that they are capable of processing information quickly and can be used to replace manual filing and searching strategies. However, as Dey (1993) and Richards and Richards (1994) point out, they do not replace the creative and conceptual tasks required of data analysis. I was anxious to lose as little as possible in terms of the participants' accounts of being stepfathers, so I chose not to use these data handling programs. However, I used computer software to aid the analysis in other ways, and used both Microsoft Word files and SPSS (version 11.5 for Windows).

The procedure for analysing the data began with a full verbatim transcription of the tape-recorded interviews into Word files, initially one file per respondent so that each respondent could be regarded as a 'case'. As the sole interviewer, I already had a good knowledge of each of the interviews in terms of the settings, non-verbal cues and other 'off-the-record' moments that occurred, either from memory or from my interview notes. Transcribing the interviews provided the opportunity to revisit the actual interview and to pick up on important features that I may have missed at the time of the interviews. Expressions, figures of speech, and use of colloquial language were all carefully written up in order to reflect more closely the actual interview in terms of the way sentiments, ideas and responses of the participants were given.

I now had an electronic copy and a hard copy of each interview to work with. The hard copies were designed to have a wide margin down the right hand side to provide space for annotation. I began by reading the hard copies and

deductively identifying broad categories that were based on the review of relevant literature (Chapter 1) that had assisted the construction of the semi-structured interview schedule. For example, the first stage in the process of developing an understanding of stepfathers was to identify the various ways these stepfathers were involved with their stepchildren. I searched for and identified the data that described the extent and diversity of stepfathers' involvement across a number of activities. I initially sought to identify all the explicitly mentioned aspects of involvement. I highlighted these instances in the text using coloured pens and noted in the margin the different activities and the extent to which I initially understood each participant to be involved under 'involvement' headings, for example 'almost no involvement', 'occasional involvement', 'involved' Furstenberg and Nord (1985) or 'very involved'.

Using highlighter pens, I then re-read the transcripts and searched through the Word case files for key words or phrases in order to discover more deeply buried references to involvement. Where these occurred, they were noted on the hard copy of the transcript. This added to my understanding of 'involvement', as it transpired that some participants were regularly involved in certain activities whilst others were involved much less regularly. I then created frequencies on each of the fourteen involvement categories which had been identified both from the literature and from stepfathers' responses. These frequencies were an amalgam of data, from responses to direct questions regarding involvement and any corroborating data obtained from the examination of the verbatim accounts, to all the material beyond the responses to direct questions about involvement. I created a simple scoring system to record different levels of involvement in activities: 0 = no involvement; 1 = some involvement; 2 = regular involvement. These data were then tabulated in Tables I, II and III; Appendix X, and summarised in Table IV (see Appendix XI). Categorising stepfathers' involvement in this way produced three distinct groups: one group of eight stepfathers with

high scores for involvement; one group of ten stepfathers with low scores for involvement; and one group of seventeen stepfathers with scores around a mid-point. I have referred to these groups of stepfathers respectively as 'highly involved', 'low involvement' and 'moderately involved' (see Chapter 5). Categorising stepfathers in this way subsequently enabled me to examine a range of factors that may have shaped stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren (see Chapter 6).

The literature review had alerted me to the complexities of stepfathers' involvement with regard to discipline and control of stepchildren. Therefore I searched the transcripts and Word files for instances of involvement in discipline and control separately from involvement in all other activities. I used a different colour to indicate instances of involvement in response to direct questions regarding stepchildren's discipline, and noted the extent of involvement in the margins of the hard copies of the transcripts as follows: 'not involved'; 'involved in partner support'; 'involved in verbal admonishment'; 'involved in physical and verbal admonishment'. Again, I re-read the transcripts and searched the Word files for other references to participants' involvement in disciplinary matters, or where they had talked about their involvement with their partners prior to becoming involved; where these occurred they were noted on the transcripts. This helped to provide a more accurate picture of stepfathers' involvement. For example, in response to a direct question, Bill had said he was not involved in disciplining the stepchildren. However, at another point in the interview he recounted an incident where he had smacked one of the stepchildren. It also transpired that Bill had not discussed his involvement in 'physical admonishment' with the stepchild's mother prior to this event. Using all the evidence available from the interviews enabled me to construct a table of stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control (Table 11), separate from stepfathers' involvement in other activities.

The effectiveness of a detailed re-reading of the transcripts was that it also enabled the analysis to proceed inductively. For example, it became apparent that stepfathers' 'non-involvement' in attending some events with stepchildren had different meanings for different stepfathers, and different coloured highlighters were used to identify this. For example, some non-involvement was due to stepfathers' preferences, that is, they said they chose not to be involved, whereas some stepfathers claimed they were excluded by others. However, in a number of cases of non-involvement, stepfathers indicated that although they had not been excluded, they would have preferred to be involved. This 'non-involvement' appeared to be due to stepfathers giving consideration to what they regarded as potentially embarrassing or conflicting situations for the stepchildren concerned. These different incidences were noted accordingly in the margins of the transcripts, with an additional note that indicated 'stepfathers' consideration of stepchildren's needs' as a potential category for further analysis.

Adopting this procedure whereby each transcript was re-read and Word files searched on a number of occasions increased my level of confidence that the assessment of the levels of involvement I arrived at for each of the stepfathers was based on all the data available. I repeated this process for each of the key topics, using different coloured pens and highlighting main quotations.

I was now in a position to set up data analysis sheets. These were A4 sheets that contained a category heading with identified sub-categories. For example, the category 'stepfather's future plans' had three sub-categories, which I noted as: 'couple-centred', 'family-focused' or 'self-centred'. Again, evidence was collated accordingly and relevant quotations were identified that summarised participant's views in their own words; these were highlighted in the

corresponding coloured pen. Examples of these were, 'waiting for kids to go', 'looking forward to being a [step]grandad', 'one day at a time' (see Appendix XII).

These A4 sheets were then transferred into Word files and cross-referenced to the participant and to the section from within the original case file, thus creating a sub-set of Word files that could be easily accessed and further analysed.

Coding and collating data from various respondents into these Word sub-files enabled me to organise, manage, retrieve and interpret meaningful bits of data whilst developing a more complete picture of how these respondents perceived their stepfathering. From these 'bits of data' I was able to compile a range of tables and charts, wall charts and matrices, in order to see the data in different ways. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) indicate that coding data in this way is a heuristic device whereby data can be re-ordered, identified and thought about in new and different ways.

I was already reasonably competent with SPSS as software for data handling, and used this initially to collate and analyse some responses to direct questions and the demographic data which can be analysed quantitatively (Chapter 4). Although there were insufficient cases to use the SPSS program for the purpose of statistical analysis, I found this program useful in organising data, examining relationships between different bits of data, and for looking for themes and patterns between the responses to different questions and sections of the interviews. Therefore, in addition to the various Word files and wall charts that I created, I also created files in SPSS for each of the respondents. As I analysed the Word files and the hard-copy transcripts, I created numerous variables in SPSS files which further assisted with categorising, interpreting and making connections within the data. This was also a useful approach when seeking to confirm emergent themes as it enabled me to identify contrasting data, paradoxes and irregularities within the data. For example, in seeking to identify

factors that resourced or constrained stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren (Chapter 6), the SPSS files enabled me to prepare quickly a number of tables which often provided a preliminary indication of which factors I would subject to further detailed scrutiny by returning to the transcripts and the Word files.

3.4 Thematic analysis

Conceptualising stepfathering required moving beyond the initial categorisation of stepfathers' involvement and searching for patterns of similarity and difference based on three key themes that emerged through the course of the analysis.

Multiple readings of the transcripts, listening to the tape recordings and preliminary analysis enabled me to identify a number of key features in respondents' accounts. These were initially noted as potential themes. The potential themes were subjected to further scrutiny for their applicability. Confirmatory or refuting evidence was sought from within the same account and from other accounts, which assisted with drawing out three themes, which were both conceptual and analytical, concerning stepfathers' meanings about the process of becoming a stepfather and being involved with stepchildren. Two of these themes used a strategy of deductive logic and were based on a review of the relevant literature (Chapter 1). The first theme was *Responsibility for stepchildren*, measured in terms of shared parenting, financial contributions, and accountability to a child's mother for the results of their actions relating to their involvement with stepchildren. The second theme was *Commitment to stepchildren*, measured in terms of developing family relations and activities that require regular involvement, for example developing involvement in children's activities through regular participation, encouraging children's participating in sports and other events, and planning for stepchildren's future.

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Thirdly, a theme emerged from within the data that related to the ways that some stepfathers responded to stepchildren's own cues and wishes for involvement with stepfathers. I have referred to this theme as *Sensitivity to stepchildren's needs*, suggesting that stepfathering was a process of negotiated involvement over time (Chapter 7).

3.5 Classifying stepfathers as cases

Cases have been used in family studies in order to contrast different family types, and to successfully highlight and illustrate family change. Thompson's (1975) study of the Edwardians additionally drew upon twelve 'carefully chosen strikingly contrasted examples' for 'the illustration of the argument' (Thompson, 2004: 239). More recently, Brannen and colleagues' study of twelve families examined change over four generations, where each generation was contextualised in relation to historical time (Brannen et al., 2004). For the purposes of understanding a complex social phenomenon, a detailed understanding of a small number of cases may shed light on the social processes involved in the social phenomenon being studied (Verschuren, 2003).

A number of definitions of the case study have been formulated. These definitions highlight the exploration of contemporary phenomena located within a real-life context. For Cresswell (1994) this is bounded by time and activity, whilst Yin (1994) contends that the boundaries between phenomena and context may not be clearly evident. However, case studies are sensitive to complexity and diversity, providing a powerful basis for interpretation (Ragin and Becker, 1994). Verschuren (2003), having reviewed case studies as a research strategy, has developed a comprehensive definition of a case study as follows:

A case study is a research strategy that can be qualified as holistic in nature, following an iterative-parallel way of preceding [sic], looking at only a few selected cases, observed in their natural context in an open-ended way, explicitly avoiding (all variants of) tunnel vision, making use of analytical comparison of cases or sub-cases, and aimed at description and explanation of complex and entangled group attributes, patterns, structures or processes (Verschuren, 2003: 137).

There are limitations related to generalisability of findings from case studies (Cresswell, 1994; Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) draws a distinction between statistical generalisation, from a quantitative approach, and analytical generalisation, from a qualitative approach. In principle, the results of a case study are 'generalisable to theoretical propositions, not to populations' (Verschuren, 2003: 134). Comparative case studies, either within a case or between contrasting cases, can be used to, improve the generality of findings (Ragin and Becker, 1994). Brannen and colleagues argued that 'a qualitative sample... where it is selected to produce contrasting cases, provides a strong foundation on which both to generate and to examine theoretical questions (Brannen et al., 2004: 5).

Central to an analysis of cases is the incorporation of the views, voices and perspectives of the relevant groups of participants and the interaction between them (Zonabend, 1992). As Patton (1990) explained, 'The case study is the descriptive, analytic, interpretive, and evaluative treatment of the more comprehensive descriptive data that is in the case record' (Patton, 1990: 304). Case study analysis should strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action, defined as sets of interrelated activities engaged in by participants in a social situation (Feagin et al., 1990). Yin (1994) advocates that, in addition to including all the relevant evidence, case study analysis should draw upon the researcher's prior knowledge in addressing the most significant aspects of the case study. Cases may subsequently be compared and contrasted (Patton, 1990).

The use of cases in this study was modest. I sought to provide thorough descriptions of the participants, to identify patterns, and in seeking to build images inductively, I drew upon the analytic principles discussed above. This ultimately enabled me to develop a three-way classification of stepfathers according to levels of involvement, and stepfathers' images of their involvement, unlike many qualitative studies, which eschew this level of analysis (see for examples Lam-Chan, 1999; Mason et al., 2002; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003). This permitted a comparative analysis to be undertaken of the diversity of stepfathering. Even this small sample of thirty-five participants produced a variety of accounts that suggested different approaches to stepfathering.

I took as a starting point the level of stepfathers' involvement, and their involvement with discipline and control (established in Chapter 5). I then drew upon participants' individual accounts in order to identify the diverse ways in which the qualities of 'care' and 'nurture' (see Chapter 1) were demonstrated through the three key themes discussed above. Once I had achieved this as far as I could, I began to look for similarities and differences between stepfathers' practices and the different ways that they represented themselves. In this way, all the stepfathers in the study were included and classified on the basis of their stepfathering in terms of self-image and nurture and care for the next generation, to create three 'ideal types' of stepfathering: 'Co-operative caretakers', 'Traditionalists', and 'Mum's boyfriends' (see Chapter 8). Inevitably some participants fitted an 'ideal type' better than others; where elements of their accounts suggested they bridged more than one category, participants were allocated to the category that most closely fitted their profile (see Appendix XIII).

Whilst I have used quotations throughout the analysis to highlight specific points, I have followed the three-way classification of stepfathers with a presentation of three case studies. Although these cases cannot be representative, they are illustrative of each of the three identified classifications. The cases have been selected in order to distinguish between the three categories, to highlight a diversity in stepfathering, and to provide an opportunity to explore and assess actions, needs, motivations and aspirations in relation to the three key themes.

3.6 Substantiating the quality of the data analysis

There are a number of research practices that qualitative researchers suggest may be employed in order to substantiate the legitimacy of the analysis of data. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest twelve tactics for confirming emergent conclusions, to reduce the potential for analytical bias, and as an aid 'in avoiding self-delusion' (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 230). These tactics can be summarised as focusing on assuring the basic quality of the data. I propose to discuss only a few of these which have particular relevance to the analysis of the data in this study (strengths and weaknesses of the study are discussed in detail in Chapter 9).

There was a bias in the sample towards middle-class participants who largely volunteered to participate. There was also a lack of external corroborative evidence, as I did not interview other stepfamily members or any associates of the participants. However, as one of my aims was to develop an understanding of what being a stepfather meant to the participants, I have sought to corroborate their accounts internally through the analytic procedures described above.

Biased observations can occur through 'researcher effects', either through the influence of the research site on the researcher or the researcher on the participants. Miles and Huberman suggest several ways of avoiding these biases. For example, in order to minimise bias stemming from researcher effects on site, researchers should seek to use unobtrusive measures, conduct interviews in a congenial social environment, and not inflate the potential problem (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 233). I conducted the majority of interviews in locations chosen by the participants, mostly in their own homes; other locations were by mutual consent. The semi-structured interview permitted the interviews to be relatively free-flowing. I directed them with a light touch in order to ensure I covered all the aspects of the interview with all of the participants and to maximise the information gathering at each opportunity. I purposefully presented myself as a student researcher interested in the stepfamily experiences of the participants, and avoided taking any personal perspective at any time throughout the interviews. In order to minimise the effects of the site on the researcher, I limited my time at the research site to the period of the interviews. I maintained a focus on questions relating to the research topic throughout the interviews, and I have not returned to any of the interview sites or to the participants for further information or clarification.

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that an appropriate means of confirming findings is to draw a contrast or to make a comparison between different sets of entities. As discussed above, I have sought throughout this study to draw upon internal comparisons, through the use of various tables and matrices (see for examples Table IV; Table 11; Table V). In Chapter 8, comparisons of cases were based on meaningful data that made sense in the context of stepfathers' caring for the next generation. Thus, following the suggestions of Hammersley (1992), I have sought to establish that the conclusions drawn from the data are credible, defensible and can be explained, that the evidence presented is central to the

arguments of the research, and that the evidence and argument logically cohere.

3.7 Conceptual framework

Within this section I will set out my search for and the development of the conceptual framework for this study. I was stimulated by the fatherhood literature, which highlighted the centrality of paternal involvement,¹⁵ and the motherhood literature on care with a focus on negotiating responsibilities for and making commitments to care. I drew upon the concept of nurturing fatherhood, and the concept of an ethics of care. This enabled me to develop a conceptualisation of stepfathering within a caring framework where the focus is on an active process of stepfathers' caring for stepchildren. The significance of these concepts for stepfathering is that once men become part of a stepfamily, major decisions or choices follow with regard to the extent of their participation in stepfamily decision-making and contributions to stepfamily life.

3.8 Paternal involvement

I was stimulated by the ways in which stepfathers, when interviewed, expressed their satisfactions, pleasures, displeasures and frustrations with the roles they had entered into. Such issues were highlighted when stepfathers made connections between negotiating responsibilities and a 'parenting' role. Darren, for example described the early stages of becoming a stepfather,

¹⁵ The terms 'paternal involvement' (Lamb et al., 1987b; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Hawkins and Palkowitz, 1999) and 'fathers' involvement' (Russell, 1999) are used by different researchers to describe the involvement of a child's biological father.

I was coming into a situation where Annie [partner] had been solely responsible [for parenting], then obviously two weeks into the relationship Annie was 100% responsible...three months into the relationship Annie was 95% responsible and it was kinda, What pace do we take this? When do I start taking some responsibilities?

Demonstrating the wide views on 'parenting' and responsibility, when asked why he was not more involved with the stepchildren, Matt replied, 'They're not mine, so I don't get too involved.'

Although few stepfathers directly referred to *making commitments*, when they did they linked this with marriage and family, or by indicating a sense of permanence in the stepfamily and a long-term future with stepchildren. For example, Daniel, who had co-resided for six years, said that shortly after becoming co-resident, he had told his stepdaughter, 'I will always be around. I want her to feel secure in that I'm not going anywhere, history will not repeat itself [a reference to the absence of the biological father].' Lupton and Barclay suggest comments of this nature are located within a fatherhood discourse of 'being there', which they contend is 'a rather amorphous term that suggests... some kind of presence rather than absence' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997: 144).

The lack of desire expressed by some stepfathers, for example, Alf, to 'take on new commitments', also lent weight to this as a central concept in stepfathering. Alf had been co-resident for one year. I interviewed him one evening when he was baby-sitting his two stepsons while his partner was out at work. He described the situation as follows:

Until this year, one month ago, this was grandmother's job. It's now becoming my job on a Tuesday night. And I come back again to "where do you see things going?" They will develop the way they do. And this is one of the developments. I suspect that at some point I'm going to go, "It's granny's job again." And I'll be out on the piss with the lads; at some

point in the next month. But then I'll probably fit back into it again for another seven weeks. It's that freedom that I'm used to.

Whilst Daniel may be looking back at what he recalls he said shortly after moving in, and Alf is talking about how he feels at this point in time, these divergent positions suggest differences in stepfathers' commitment. What stepfathers actually do in terms of their involvement with stepchildren, and the ways in which they perceive their involvement, are likely to be central to understanding why some stepfathers are more involved than others.

Although there are some parallels between what stepfathers do and what biological fathers do, there is also a recognition that there are differences (Mason et al., 2002) which can affect the ways in which stepfathers participate in their stepchildren's lives. Several factors are present in stepfathering which are absent from biological fathering. Among these are the continued presence of non-resident fathers, stepfathers' own non-resident or co-resident children from previous relationships, stepchildren's and partners' family experiences that differ from those of stepfathers. All or some of these may present challenges to stepfathers 'parenting' when compared to the parental involvement of co-resident biological fathers (Mason et al, 2002).

When stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren has been compared to biological fathers' involvement with their own children, findings have not always been consistent. For example, Ahrons and Wallisch (1987); Hetherington et al. (1982); Thompson et al. (1992) found stepfathers to be less involved with stepchildren than biological fathers were with their own children. Stepfathers provided less warmth and nurturance (Amato, 1987; Hetherington et al., 1992) and exerted less control (Amato, 1987) than biological fathers. Several other studies found stepfathers to be active and involved with stepchildren in similar ways to biological fathers (Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1987; Bray et al., 1994;

Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Mason et al., 2002). Although stepfathers may be involved in similar ways to biological co-resident fathers, the differences between stepfathers and biological fathers is such that I questioned the applicability of the dominant biological model of fatherhood in stepfatherhood research.

A traditional biological father model as a framework for analysis was further weakened by an emergent concept, which I have referred to as sensitivity to stepchildren's needs. It became apparent from the interviews that a number of stepfathers were going to some lengths to prioritise the needs of stepchildren over their own. Although sensitivity was not a term used by stepfathers, the ways in which some talked about their involvement, or indeed their non-involvement in certain activities, suggested that involvement was not straightforward and that they were giving consideration to their stepchildren's needs over their own. For example, some stepfathers had decided not to participate in certain activities with their stepchildren where they thought stepchildren might find their presence difficult, conflicting or embarrassing.

3.8.1 Quantity and quality of fathers' involvement

The three key concepts of fathering referred to above (see 1.9.2), time spent interacting with children, availability to children, and accountability or responsibility for children (Lamb et al., 1987b) can be assessed in quantitative terms, and a number of studies have measured frequency of involvement (see for examples, Marsiglio, 1991; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1993; Minton and Pasley, 1996). The importance of the salience of fathering in terms of contributions to children's well being and in shaping men's identities has been highlighted by Palkowitz (1997); Hawkins and Palkowitz, (1999); Jaffee et al., (2003). Salience of fathering in male identities is considered to provide benefits to fathers in

terms of gaining a sense of maturity and status, developing self-esteem, and offering life satisfaction through increased spousal praise, enhancing fathers' role identity and encouragement to maintain their involvement (Barnett et al., 1992; Levine and Pitt, 1995; Hawkins and Palkowitz, 1999, Marsiglio et al., 2000, Pasley et al., 2001). Gottman (1998) stated, 'It is not enough for fathers to be in their children's lives. They need to be there as emotionally engaged and sensitive fathers' (Gottman, 1998: 182).

These shifts in conceptualising fathers' involvement where the focus is on a diversity of approaches to fathers' involvement in parenting, suggest that stepfathers' involvement in step-parenting can be examined through a fathering lens. In this study, stepfathers' involvement is examined in Chapter 5 by quantitatively and qualitatively assessing involvement across a range of practical childcare activities such as talking, playing, eating with stepchildren, supporting their learning through involvement in homework, school and college projects, and involvement in leisure and sporting activities. Factors that may shape stepfathers' involvement are also examined in Chapter 5.

3.9 Fatherhood and care

Ideologically fathers have defined their masculine identity through their employment (Morgan, 1992; Mintz, 1998; Warin et al., 1999), largely because fathers were often the main breadwinners (Warin et al., 1999; Dowd, 2000). Masculinity was perceived to be incompatible with becoming actively involved in childcare (Lamb, 1987; Barker, 1994; Connell, 1995) so that fathers resisted any increase in their role as carers for their children (Lamb et al., 1987b). However, Brannen and Nilsen (2006) have recently identified that fathers may always have had some involvement in child care-giving, although men in

Reflections on the focus of this study

My personal interest in stepfamilies as a topic of research stemmed originally from my time as a sociology undergraduate at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1986. As the secretary of the Sociological Society I had the task of inviting various researchers and authors to talk at our regular monthly meetings. Shortly after the publication of Burgoyne and Clark's (1984) study of stepfamilies in Sheffield; 'Making a Go of It', Jacqueline Burgoyne accepted my invitation to talk to our group. I read this study and her previous work in order to prepare an introduction for her talk, and by way of preparing for conversation over lunch. I was unaware that I would not hear her speak again. Ten years later, I revisited the stepfamily theme when studying for my master's degree in the Sociology of Education. I attempted to make contact with Jacqueline Burgoyne at that time, and was informed by David Clark, of her untimely death.

I took as a focus for the dissertation the differential attainments at school of children from lone mother families, stepfamilies and first-marriage families. As part of the data gathering I replicated the research instruments initially used by Fogelman and colleagues in their National Child Development Study (NCDS¹) study published in 1981, with a cohort of sixteen year olds in schools in south London (see Fogelman et al., 1981; Fogelman, 1983). I was able to draw some comparisons between the two samples, which indicated the differences in attainment levels were in the direction indicated by the original representative study. My curiosity was aroused, and I decided to examine stepfamilies in more detail, and more specifically stepfathers' involvement in stepfamilies.

¹ National Child Development Study, a longitudinal study of children (N=17,414), born in the first week of March 1958 in the UK.

previous generations may not have understood their involvement in terms of care. Other researchers may not have been attuned to this.

Social and economic changes have resulted in more women in paid employment, the majority of households are now dual-earner households. Fathers in dual-earner households share more of the household chores and childcare tasks than in households where fathers were the sole earner (Ferri and Smith, 1996; Pleck, 1997). However, the majority of fathers remain peripheral as carers (Burghes et al., 1997), and women retain primary responsibility for home and childcare (Gottfried et al., 1997). The socialisation of gendered roles from childhood through to parenthood has meant that women rather than men in Western societies provide the caring (Ferri and Smith, 1998; Lamb, 1999; Russell, 1999), and care has been defined largely in terms of what women do (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Graham (1983) has also criticised the socialisation perspective as it underplayed the contribution of economic and social relations to the social construction of the caring role.

In placing less emphasis on traditional gendered parenting roles, Lamb (1987) has focused more on 'the role fathers play in the direct care of children of all ages' (Lamb, 1987: 4). This is in line with suggestions that the role of provider has diminished as a basis for identity formation for fathers (Brandth and Kvande, 1998). Rather than a unified model of masculinity, it is more appropriate to conceptualise a plurality of masculinities in relation to fathering (Collier, 1995; Connell, 1995; Morgan, 2002b), and to acknowledge that fathers' involvement has become 'multidimensional' (Flouri and Buchanan, 2003: 95).

I then turned to literature that related to issues of care, care work and motherhood (see for examples, Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). The core

values of an ethic of care were defined by Tronto (1993) as attentiveness to the need for care, responsiveness, competence and willingness to accept responsibility for others and for the results of one's actions. Care can be identified as the practical activities that the carer is involved with, in terms of 'caring for' someone and taking responsibility for initiating caring activities. 'Caring about someone' has a moral dimension¹⁶ and is conceived in terms of having regard for others' needs, where attentiveness to their needs provides a starting point for action (van Dongen, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Caring for and caring about are not readily separable (Tronto, 1993). Mason (1996) has sought to re-conceptualise care as sentient activity (sensitivity to the needs of others), and active sensibility (where people start to take responsibility), where the practical activities of care and the orientations to care coincide. Sentient activity is described as the ways that specific others' needs are identified, interpreted, thought through and worked out, and how meeting those needs is planned and organised. Active sensibility refers to a predisposition to form connections between oneself and specific others and to take on a responsibility for, or to make a commitment to others (Mason, 1996).

While women may see caring as 'natural', this is a social construction and, as studies of lone fathers and elder care have shown, much caring can be done by males (see for examples, O'Brien, 1984; Arber and Ginn, 1991). Although care is a gendered concept (Brandth and Kvande, 1993), Lamb's (1998) research suggests that gender matters less in parenting than family context. Providing warmth and closeness, and how time is spent with children are regarded as more important than the amount of time spent with children. This reduced emphasis on gendered parenting roles, accompanied by a development of a plurality of masculinities and a diversity of fathering, has led some fatherhood

¹⁶ See Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003) for a discussion of moral imperatives in step-parenting.

researchers to suggest that whether fathers are biological or social is less important than whether they are caring for the next generation.

Critics of this perspective maintain that fathers are by definition biological. Gendered role difference and biological fathers' presence are essential elements of successful child rearing (see for examples, Popenoe, 1994; Blankenhorn, 1995). However, others have suggested that, theoretically, a caring framework can become an appropriate means by which fathers' involvement (biological or social) with children can be interpreted and understood (Dollahite et al., 1996; Palkowitz, 1997; Pleck, 1997; Flouri and Buchanan, 2003).

3.10 Chapter summary

Within this chapter I have outlined the procedures that I followed in the thematic analysis using deductive and inductive analytic strategies, and the ways in which I classified and comparatively analysed stepfathering through a case study analysis. I have described the conceptual framework which I anticipated will prove useful in analysing the research data. I have particularly drawn upon the concept of nurturing fatherhood as developed within some of the fatherhood literature, and the concept of an ethics of care developed within motherhood literature. Although I did not apply the concept of an ethics of care as developed by Tronto (1993) in setting out on this study, in the analysis of the interviews it was clear that sub-concepts within an ethics of care framework were useful in describing the ways in which many of the men talked about stepfathering. Using such concepts and the neutral term 'involvement' to describe what men do for stepchildren, and how much men do with stepchildren, has helped to show in what ways 'new' family relations and caring relationships extend to stepfathers, to illustrate the diverse ways in which stepfathers care for stepchildren, and to

shed some light upon the processes whereby some stepfathers become more actively involved than others. Throughout the analysis my aim has been to explore and further an understanding of how men develop and express their identities as stepfathers in different situations and this will be the focus of Chapters 7 and 8. In the following chapter I will outline the demographic characteristics of the sample and in Chapters 5 and 6, I will examine stepfathers' practical involvement and factors that shape their involvement.

4 Stepfathers' histories and demographic characteristics

4.1 Introduction

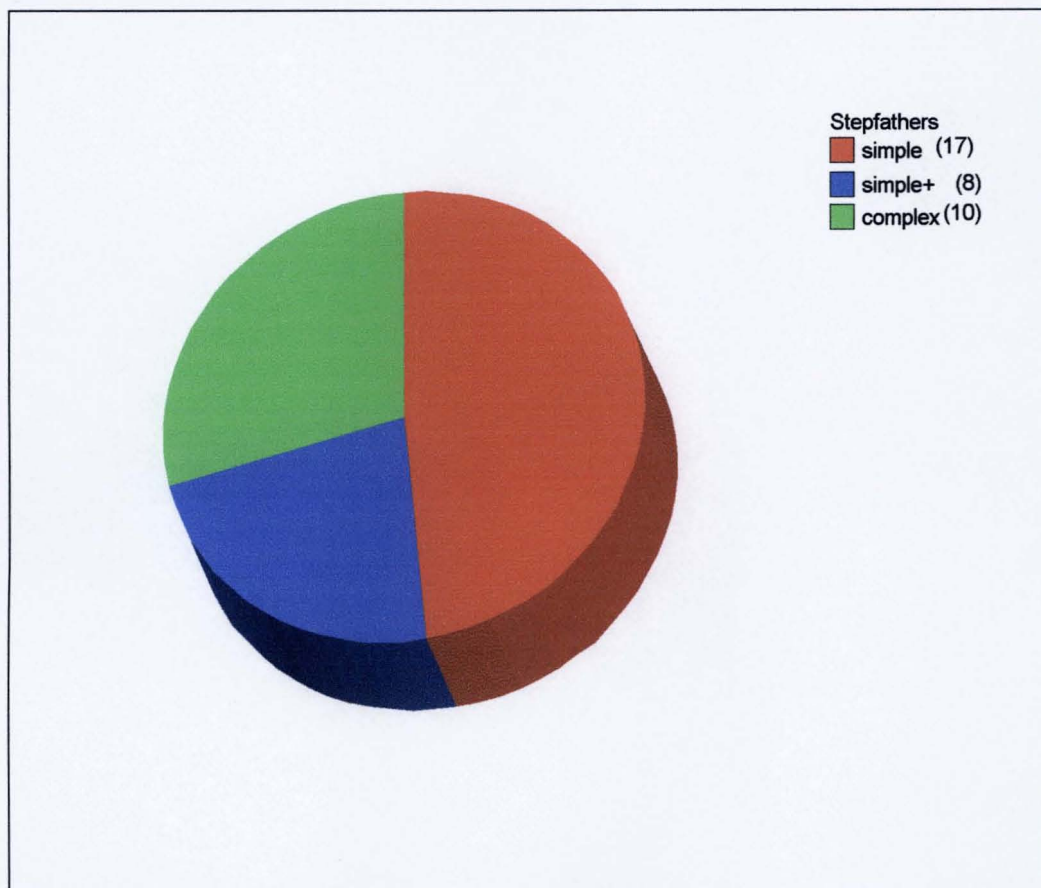
Within this chapter I will provide a summary of the demographic data that related to the stepfathers who participated in the interview study and their social environments. Demographic characteristics covered will include family size and household composition, stepfathers' marital status, ages of stepfathers and their partners, and stepfathers' ethnicity. Economic factors will include employment, income, formal education and housing. Stepfathers' occupations will also be used to identify their social class position. Internal comparisons will be made between stepfathers within this study and reference will be made to national stepfamily demographic data. Where it is possible to make broad comparisons with national data this will be done in order to indicate similarities and differences between the sample and national data and not to make any inference from the study data.

4.2 Stepfamily characteristics

The stepfathers in this study had all formed family systems that contained children who were biologically related to their mothers and were not biologically related to the stepfathers. I assigned stepfathers to one of three categories based on whether they had (a) no children of their own: 'simple', (b) had children born into the stepfamily and these were stepfathers' first children: 'simple-plus', and (c) had children of their own from previous relationships: 'complex' (see Chapter 1). The majority of stepfathers, and almost half the sample were 'simple' stepfather families (17/35). 'Complex' (10/35) and 'simple-plus' stepfather families (8/35), each represented approximately one quarter of the

sample. (See Figure 3 below for the distribution of stepfather families in this study).

Figure 3: Types of stepfamilies



Although I will use this typology comparatively within the study, it tends to oversimplify the complex nature of the actual structures of some of these stepfamilies. For example, it does not differentiate between part-time and full-time cohabiting stepfathers, nor does it differentiate between stepfathers in

‘complex’ stepfamilies who have had subsequent children born within these stepfamilies, sometimes referred to as ‘complex-plus’, of which there were three in this study. These data are summarised by the numbers of stepfathers, for each different type of stepfather family that is represented within the study in Table 1.

Table 1:Types of stepfamilies formed by participants

Type of stepfamily	N
Resident stepfather, no children from previous relationships, no children born into current relationship	15
Part-time resident stepfather, no children from previous relationships, no children born into current relationship	2
Resident stepfather, no children from previous relationships, children born into current relationship	8
Resident stepfather, non-resident children from previous relationships, no children born into current relationship	4
Part-time resident stepfather, non-resident children from previous relationships, no children born into current relationship	1
Resident stepfather, co-resident children from previous relationships, no children born into current relationship	2
Resident stepfather, non-resident children from previous relationships, children born into current relationship	2
Resident stepfather, co-resident children from previous relationships, children born into current relationship	1
Total participants	35

Although this was a study of stepfathers, more than half of the sample (18/35) were also fathers to children of their own, some of whom were co-resident, others were non-resident.

National data indicate that the majority of stepfamilies with dependent children are stepfather families (82%), thirteen percent have a stepmother and a natural father, and five per cent have both a stepfather and a stepmother (ONS, 2006). A subsequent child is born into approximately half of all stepfamilies (Haskey; 1994, Ferri and Smith, 1998). Stepfathers in this study were slightly under-

representative of this, as only approximately one-third (11/35) of stepfathers had experienced the birth of a child in their current stepfamily. Ferri and Smith (1998) indicate that continuing parental responsibilities of stepfathers, towards children outside the stepfamily household, may constrain stepfathers from having subsequent children within their current relationship. Of the ten stepfathers who had children from previous relationships, only three had subsequent children born in their stepfamilies (3/10).

The majority of 'complex' stepfathers had non-resident children from their previous relationships (7/10). In common with social expectations, the majority of post-divorce children continued to live with their mothers. Of the three stepfamilies where stepfathers' own children from previous relationships were co-resident, two resulted from the death of the children's mothers, and the third resulted from the intervention of social services.¹⁷

4.3 Marriage and cohabitation

Stepfathers were almost equally divided between those who were married and those who cohabited. Seventeen stepfathers were married and eighteen were in cohabiting relationships. National data indicate that slightly more stepfamilies are married (approximately 55%) than cohabit (ONS, 2006).

Almost all stepfathers' partners were reported to have been previously married (31/35). Less than half of stepfathers reported they had previously married (13/35). Thirty stepfathers' partners' marriages had ended in divorce, one was widowed, compared to eleven stepfathers' marriages, which ended in divorce; two were widowed. The remarriage rate for stepfathers (8/13) was slightly

¹⁷ Social services were reported to have taken the children from the mother and placed them with their father on the grounds of allegations of physical abuse by the children's mother's new partner; their stepfather.

higher than that for stepfathers' partners (16/31). The two stepfathers and one partner who had all experienced the death of a spouse had remarried (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Stepfathers (SF) and partners previous and current marital status

		Current marital status		
Previous marital status		Cohabiting	Married	Total
	Single SF - divorced partner	11	7	18
	Single SF - single partner	2	2	4
	Single SF - widowed partner	1	-	1
	Divorced SF - divorced partner	3	7	10
	Widowed SF - divorced partner	-	2	2
	Total	17	18	35

The under-representation of married stepfathers may be due to the reluctance on the part of some stepfathers to enter into marriage. Although four stepfathers reported they were engaged to be married, nine said they either did not want to get married, or had 'just never really got round to doin' it' (Fred). Only four stepfathers reported that their partners (all of whom were previously married) did not wish to re-marry.

4.4 Children in stepfamilies

Stepfamilies are often larger and more widespread than household boundaries would suggest. Ferri and Smith (1998) noted the need to distinguish between stepfamily household and stepfamily networks. Having regard for those stepfamily members living beyond step-household boundaries leads to a better understanding of the actual size and complexity of stepfamilies. For example some stepchildren may reside permanently or partially in other households, stepfathers may have biological children from previous relationships that live elsewhere or there may be adult stepchildren who live independently. The stepfamilies in this study were no exception to this and had a total of 103 children. As anticipated, not all lived within the step-households (24). A total of 79 stepchildren and children lived within step-households. Step-households ranged in size from 1 to 5 children (mean 2.3; SD 1.2). This is consistent with recent findings for stepfamily households in the UK (Smith et al., 2001).

Table 3: Number of children born pre/post stepfamily formation and stepchildren by stepfathers' marital status

		Children in stepfamilies			
		Stepfathers' own child from previous relationship	Child born into stepfamily	Stepchild	Total
Stepfathers' current marital status	Married (18)	10	11	37	58
	Cohabiting (17)	5	4	36	45
	Total	15	16	76	103

Married stepfathers were more likely to be fathers to children of their own either from their current relationship or from previous relationships (12/18) than were

Introduction to the study

Stepfamilies are at the forefront of family and lifestyle change (Ferri and Smith, 2003). Recent trends in adult relationship formation, marriage, divorce, cohabitation and re-partnering suggest that the number of stepfamilies in contemporary society has increased, and many adults and children will experience being part of a stepfamily at some point in their lives (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000). Figures for 2001 indicate that 10% of all families in the UK with dependent children were stepfamilies. The majority (88%) are stepfather families (ONS, 2006). However, many of the studies that have sought to gather data on stepfathers, from stepfather households, have relied upon sources other than stepfathers (see for a recent example, Schwartz and Finley, 2006). These data have added little to understanding stepfathers' perspectives on stepfathering. However, this weakness has begun to be addressed by several recent studies (see for examples Brannen et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2001; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003).

Societal expectations of men in families are that they should be more actively involved in the care of their own children (Marsiglio et al., 2000). However, this is complicated by the fact that many men live apart from their biological children (Burghes et al., 1997), and increasingly live with children to whom they are not biologically related. Furthermore, an increasing number of men may have some involvement in 'parenting' outside the conventional route of biological paternity (Marsiglio, 2004). There is a growing recognition that men in contemporary Western societies may occupy a diversity of 'father' roles, which suggests different parenting experiences. This has led some fatherhood researchers to propose broadening the definition of 'father' to include men, other than biological fathers, who are providing care for children to whom they are not

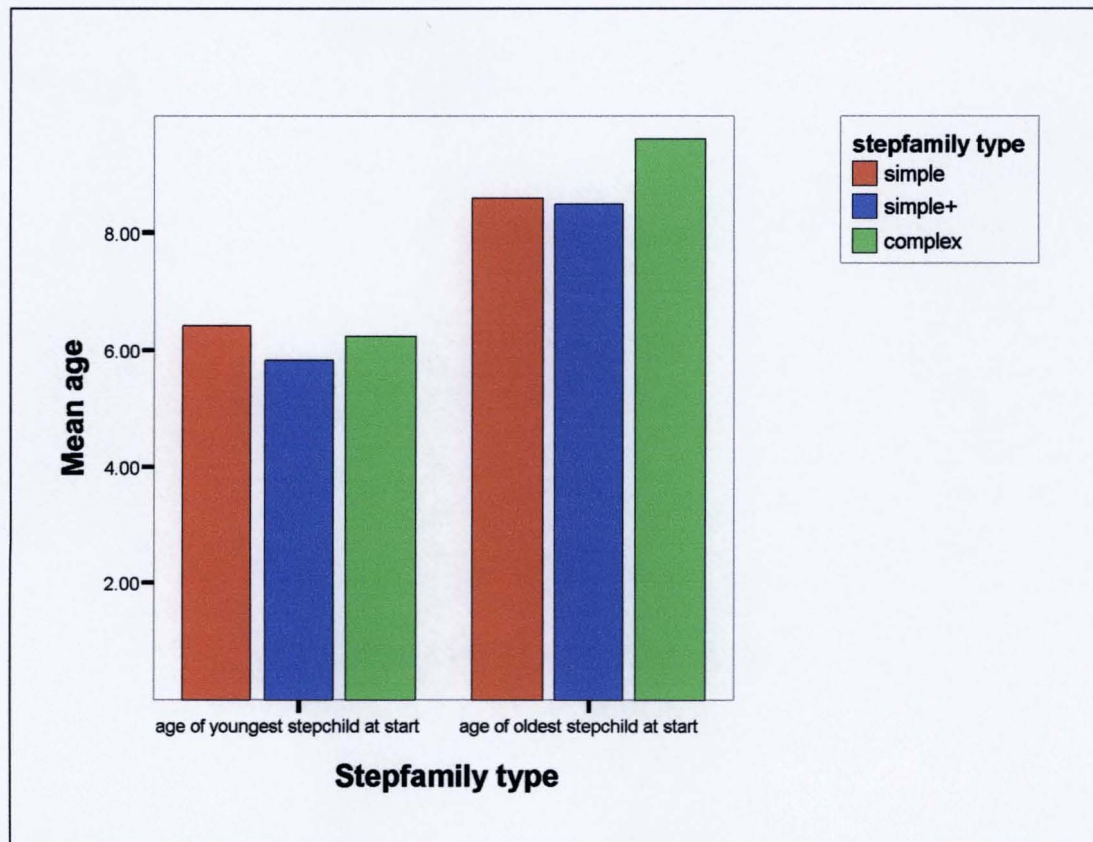
cohabiting stepfathers (5/17; see Table 3). The birth of a subsequent child was more likely to take place within a married relationship.

4.4.1 Stepchildren's age distribution

Previous research suggests that the development of stepfather-stepchild relations can be more difficult when stepchildren are adolescent when the stepfamily is formed (Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Ganong et al., 1999). The mean age of the youngest stepchild and the oldest stepchild at the time of the stepfamily formation by the type of stepfamily that was formed are presented in Figure 4. Approximately two-thirds of stepfamilies had the youngest stepchild aged between four and eleven years (24/35), eight stepfamilies had a youngest stepchild under four years old and three stepfamilies had a youngest stepchild between eleven and fifteen years old. In approximately two-thirds of stepfamilies the oldest stepchild was pre-adolescent (24/35), approximately one-third were adolescent, between the ages of eleven and nineteen.

The mean ages of the youngest and oldest stepchildren were calculated. In stepfamilies where there was only one stepchild, s/he was allocated to the 'oldest' stepchild category. The mean age of stepchildren in the 'youngest stepchild' category was 6.2 years (SD 3.3. Min. 1; Max.15). The mean age of stepchildren in the 'oldest stepchild' category was 8.9 years (SD 4.4. Min.2; Max. 19). Complex stepfamilies tended to have stepchildren that were slightly older than other stepfamilies at the time of stepfamily formation. This might suggest that stepfathers in complex stepfamilies experience more difficulty in developing stepfather-stepchild relations with these older stepchildren, particularly in the early stages of stepfamily formation (see Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 2000).

Figure 4: Mean age of youngest and oldest stepchild at time of stepfamily formation by stepfamilytype



4.5 Duration of stepfathers' relationships with current partners

The duration of stepfathers' relationships with their current partners ranged from a minimum of one year to a maximum of fifteen years (mean 5.6 years, SD 3.9). The length of time that stepfathers had co-resided with their current

partners was slightly shorter with a minimum of one year and a maximum of thirteen years (mean 4.1 years, SD 3.7). Although stepfathers with short and long periods of co-residence were represented in the sample, the majority had been co-resident with their partners for between one and two years (20/35), eight had co-resided between three and seven years and seven from eight to thirteen years. Married stepfathers had co-resided for slightly longer (mean 4.8 years, SD 4.0. Min 1; Max 13) than cohabiting stepfathers (mean 3.2 years, SD 3.7 Min. 1; Max. 11).

The majority of stepfathers (33/35) went through a period of 'courtship', getting to know their partners and in some cases their stepchildren, prior to becoming co-resident. In only two cases, stepfathers began to co-reside almost immediately upon meeting their current partners. The majority of stepfathers were permanently co-resident with their partners (33/35), two stepfathers were in part-time cohabiting relationships. All stepfathers were in heterosexual relationships; there were no same sex relationships within this sample.

All stepfathers reported having had previous relationships, the majority were in relationships immediately prior to their current relationship (27/35), eight said they were 'single' and not in a relationship. Five stepfathers said this was their first 'serious' relationship. Stepfathers' previous relationships had a mean duration of 4.5 years (SD 2.7. Min.1; Max. 9). A minority of stepfathers had previously been married (13/35), and were divorced at the time of the interviews.

Stepfathers reported a variety of reasons for their previous relationships ending; 'natural breakdown' or as some said 'drifting apart' (9/27), met their current partners (6/27), previous partners left them for someone-else (5/27), either

they or their partners had moved away to work or live in a different area (5/27), death of a spouse (2/27).

The majority of stepfathers' partners (31/35) were reported to have previously been married to their children's fathers, three had cohabited with their children's fathers, one had never lived with her child's father. Stepfathers' partners' previous relationships had a range from one to twenty years and on average were of longer duration than stepfathers' previous relationships (mean 8.4 years, SD 4.6).

4.6 Age profile of stepfathers and their partners

Analysis of the national demographic structure of (married) stepfamilies identified a similarity in mean ages of stepfathers and their partners, (mean 36.6 years) (Haskey, 1994).

Stepfathers' ages in this sample ranged from a minimum of twenty-seven years to a maximum of fifty-two years (mean 38.8, SD 5.7). Stepfathers' partners' ages ranged from a minimum of twenty-six years to a maximum of fifty-two years (mean 37.9, SD 5.9). There were slight differences between married and cohabiting stepfathers and their respective partners. Married stepfathers were on average 1.5 years older than cohabiting stepfathers and both married and cohabiting stepfathers were on average one year older than their partners.

When stepfathers and their partners' ages were compared across stepfamily types, there was a noticeable difference with stepfathers in 'Complex' stepfamilies being older than stepfathers in either 'Simple' or 'Simple-plus' stepfamilies (see Table 4).

Table 4: Mean ages of stepfathers and partners by stepfamily type

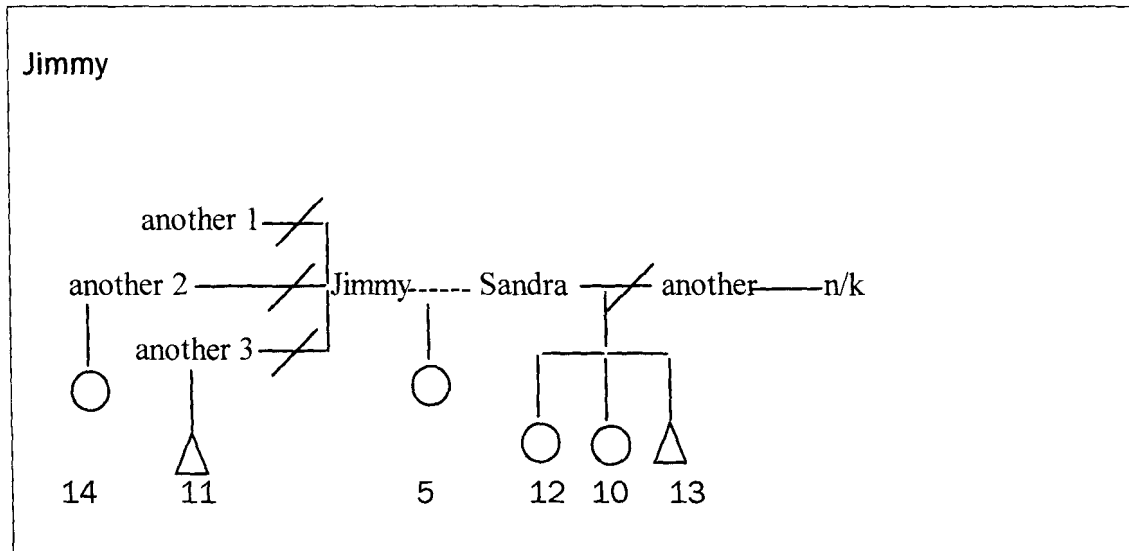
		Stepfathers' mean age	Partners' mean age
Stepfamily type	Simple	37.1	36.6
	Simple+	38.4	39.5
	Complex	42.0	39.0
	Total	38.8	37.9

These stepfathers and their partners were, on average, in their 'mid-life' period. The vast majority of their partners had experienced a prior marital relationship and been through a divorce. In contrast, most stepfathers had not. This might suggest that there is a relationship power, knowledge or experience differential in favour of the stepchildren's mothers. Therefore, in order for stepfathers to gain access to or to be involved with stepchildren they may be required to engage in a process of negotiation with their partners. I will return to this aspect of stepfathers' involvement in Chapter 7.

4.7 Stepfathers' biographies

As the demographic data indicated, many of these stepfamilies were complicated. This often means that some stepfamily members can be unsure who is part of their family constellation. The most usual focus is on the stepfamily household, although several researchers suggest that this is insufficient and the family bounded by household is no longer an adequate interpretative approach in attempting to understand the interplay of stepfamily members (Ferri and Smith, 1998). For each of the stepfathers who took part in the study I have collated the knowledge they provided regarding their stepfamily members and prepared a brief biography, which graphically and textually summarises their stepfamilies. In Figure 5, below I have provided an example of one particularly complex stepfamily and an accompanying narrative (see Appendix XIV for biographies of all the stepfamilies in this study).

Figure 5: Stepfamily constellation



Jimmy was 44 years old and did not get on at all well with his father, they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection. Jimmy had been married three times, all for short periods, and had two non-resident children from those relationships. He had been in this current relationship for 10 years and had cohabited for 9 years. His partner, Sandra, was previously married for 6 years. Neither had a period of living alone prior to cohabiting. Jimmy worked part-time in the building trade earning £12,000 per year and Sandra worked part-time cleaning earning £2,000. Jimmy referred to all the children as 'my children' and the children were reported to all refer to Jimmy as 'Dad'. The non-resident-father had re-married and saw his children monthly. Jimmy tolerated his contact with the children. Jimmy did not see his children from his previous marriages. Jimmy had a long-term view of the future with the stepfamily as expressed by his comment; '...I'm gonna be 'appy until its time to go'. (The key to the symbols used is contained in Appendix XIV.)

4.8 Stepfathers' employment

With the exception of one stepfather who was unemployed at the time of the interviews, the remainder were in employment. The majority were employees (23/35) with almost one-third self-employed (11/35). It is not uncommon in the UK to work long hours. Ferri and Smith (1998) established that sixty-five percent of stepfathers worked more than forty hours per week. The weekly hours stepfathers in employment worked ranged from 30 to 70 (mean 44 hours SD 8.0). The majority of stepfathers' partners were reported to be in employment (28/35, see Table 5). The majority were employed for less than thirty-five hours per week (16/28). Stepfathers' partners' employment ranged from 10 to 55 hours per week (mean 29.4 SD 11.5).

Table 5: Stepfathers and partners' weekly employed hours

Hours worked per week in employment	Stepfathers	Stepfathers' partners
Not employed	1	7
>35 hrs	1	16
35 - 40 hrs	16	9
<40 hrs	17	3
Total	35	35

4.9 Social class

Using the Registrar General's Classification of Occupations (OPCS, 1991), stepfathers' current or most recent occupations were used to identify their social class position. (See Appendix XV, for a composite of each stepfather's occupation and social class history) The majority of stepfathers were employed in non-manual occupations (28/35), seven were in manual occupations (see Table 6). Smith et al. (2001) identified sixty percent of their representative

sample of stepparents were in non-manual occupations. Therefore, this sample considerably over-represents stepfathers in non-manual occupations.

Table 6: Social class classification of stepfathers

Registrar General's social class classification	N
I and II: professional/managerial	18
IIIN: skilled non-manual	10
IIIM: skilled manual	2
IV and V: partially skilled/unskilled	5
Total	35

I acknowledge that solely using the male's occupation as a method of identifying a family's social class position can be criticised as providing a narrow view of the changing nature of social class in contemporary society. Neither does it recognise the contribution made to a family's lifestyle by the female partner, nor to the impact that divorce and remarriage may have had on the social class position of some women (see for discussion of social class classification in stepfamilies, Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003).

It was my intention that the study would include stepfathers from across all social class groups. However, as this was largely a self-report sample, I recognised that, in line with other's findings, (see Coleman and Ganong, 1990 for discussion) this would be more likely to attract middle-class participants over working-class participants.

4.10 Stepfathers' educational achievements

The majority of stepfathers (25/35) had achieved at least 'A' level qualifications, or an equivalent level of study with one-third of the sample obtaining a university degree. Thirteen stepfathers reported that they left school

at age sixteen, six had achieved 'O' level or GCSE qualifications, four had obtained no educational qualifications (see Appendix XV).

4.11 Household income

Only two stepfathers reported having gross household incomes of less than £20,000 per annum. In one case the stepfather was unemployed and his partner was also not employed. The other stepfather worked less than thirty hours per week and his partner worked part-time for less than fifteen hours per week.

In the majority of cases (30/35) stepfathers were the main income earners. Stepfathers' annual income (see Table 7) ranged from a minimum of £7,000 to a maximum of £600,000 per annum (median £25,000). Not all stepfathers' partners were in paid employment and five were reported to have no income. Thirty had income from either part-time or full-time employment. Stepfathers' partners' annual income was reported to range from a minimum of £2,000 to a maximum of £50,000 (median £10,500). The annual household median income for this sample was £40,000.

Table 7: Stepfather, partner and household annual income

£ Annual Income	Stepfather	Partner	Household
Less than 20,000	6	23	2
20,000-29,000	14	2	5
30,000-39,000	6	3	8
40,000-49,000	5	2	8
More than 49,000	4	1	12
N/a or not known	-	4	-
Total	35	35	35

The majority of stepfathers regarded their households to have become financially 'better off' since their arrival (24/35). Seven thought their households had become 'slightly better off' and four reported that they did not think they had made much difference to household finances.

4.12 Additional household income

All thirty-five stepfathers had one stepchild aged eighteen years or younger. Stepfathers' partners, with the exception of one, who had been widowed, were entitled to receive child support payments from non-resident fathers. Additional household income, in the form of child support payments made by non-resident fathers, was reported in almost two-thirds of cases (22/34). In twelve cases stepfathers reported that their partners did not receive any child support payments from non-resident fathers.

4.13 Ethnicity

Although this study was geographically located within a culturally diverse region of the South East of England and within London, I found difficulty in obtaining a diversity of stepfathers from different ethnic origins who were prepared to participate in this study. The majority of the participants (29/35) were white and British born, two were white European, one was white Australian. With the exception of one stepfather living with a Ghanaian partner, all were living with white British born partners.

I attempted to reach stepfathers from minority ethnic groups to participate in the interviews. Several men from non-white ethnic origins that I knew to be stepfathers were approached, either by myself or by others on my behalf, and asked to be interviewed; all but three declined. Anecdotal information from

biologically related: social fathers² (Lamb et al., 1987b; Dollahite et al., 1996; Dowd, 2000). These social and conceptual changes suggested that it was a timely undertaking to examine what being a stepfather means to those men who become stepfathers.

Qualitative studies that have focused solely on an examination of the everyday contingencies and the different experiences of men living with other people's children are largely absent from the body of stepfamily literature. This study has sought to fill this gap. In order to examine how the attitudes, feelings and perceptions of stepfathers are shaped through their involvement with stepchildren, I sought to listen to the voices of stepfathers, and to learn what they had to say about their own experiences of their role.

The aims of this study were to develop knowledge and understanding of the processes of stepfathering, the meanings stepfathers derived from stepfathering, and to provide a qualitative assessment of stepfathering.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Investigate empirically the parenting practices of one group of men involved in social fathering, namely stepfathers
- locate stepfathers' interpretations and definitions of their 'parenting' activities with their stepchildren within the wider ideological context of fathering, parenting and contemporary stepfamily living, and
- identify the factors that led some stepfathers to be more involved with stepchildren than others

² Social father is a term used widely in fatherhood literature to refer to men who are not biologically related to the children in their care, which includes stepfathers. Burgoyne and Clarke (1984) used this term to describe stepfathers who were living with a partner and her co-resident or partially co-resident children.

contacts within the Indian and Bangladeshi communities who helped me to identify Asian stepfathers suggested that there is a reluctance among Asian families to recognise publicly that an Asian marriage had ended in divorce and that the family had been reconstituted. This may be one factor that inhibited stepfathers from this ethnic group coming forward. For African-Caribbean men, their relationship structure may be culturally more fluid, and the concept of 'stepfather' may not be recognised in the way that it is in Anglo-Saxon culture. A study of African-Americans in the US indicated that the term stepfather was hardly ever used within this ethnic group (see Furstenberg et al., 1992). In African-Caribbean culture the role of 'baby father' is a dominant feature and provides a link to the child.

Three stepfathers from minority ethnic groups were successfully recruited through personal contacts: one British born African-Caribbean living with a white British partner, one Black African living with an African born partner and one Asian, born in Pakistan, living with a partner also from Pakistan.

One of the three stepfathers from a minority ethnic group (Hassan) who participated in the study explained that, for him, the term 'stepfather' described the way that he regarded himself in British culture. He said that in his African culture, marrying a woman who had children indicated to other members of his society that he had taken these children as his own.

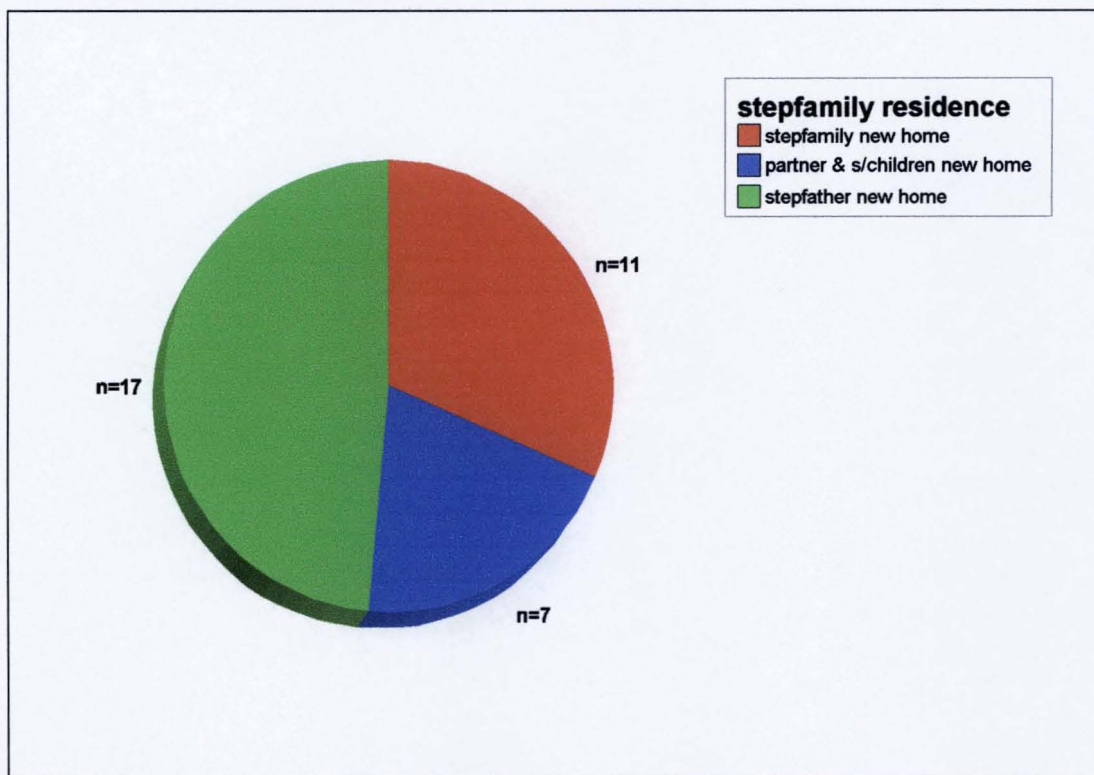
In percentage terms, the three non-white participants equate to approximately 9% of the sample. This figure is slightly above the national average, where the population of minority ethnic groups represents 8% (ONS, 2002). However, as much of the interview sample was obtained from around the Greater London area, where the ethnic minority population is almost 29%, (ONS, 2002), it was disappointing that the penetration into ethnic minority groups was not greater.

4.14 Housing

Moving home is often related to family transitions, either when one relationship ends or when another begins (see Lewis et al., 2002). The majority of stepfathers' partners and children had experienced moving home at least once in the last five years (20/35). Fifteen stepfathers had moved into the homes that their partners and stepchildren had lived in prior to the formation of their stepfamily relationships and sixteen had moved with their stepfamilies into new homes for the stepfamily (see Figure 6 below).

Only four stepfathers continued to live in the homes they had occupied prior to the commencement of their stepfamily relationships, one of whom reported plans to move to a 'new' stepfamily home. The majority of stepfathers lived in houses (26/35), eight lived in flats and one lived on a Dutch barge on the river Thames. Most of the houses or flats were 'owner occupied' and mortgaged (27/35), eight were rented. The houses were mainly in the names of stepfathers' partners (14/35), ten were in stepfathers' names only, and eleven were jointly owned or rented, being in both stepfathers' and their partners' names. Four of the rented houses were local authority properties; seven were private rentals.

Figure 6: Stepfamilies' home moving



4.15 Chapter summary

Within this chapter I have presented the key demographic characteristics of the sample. Approximately half were 'simple' stepfather families, these stepfathers had no prior experience of living with children. Eight stepfathers had formed 'simple-plus', and ten had formed 'complex' stepfamilies. Two-thirds of the sample was recently formed stepfamilies having been co-resident for three years of less. Stepchildren varied in age from preschool age to adolescent. Stepfathers and their partners were similarly matched in ages. Two-fifths of stepfathers were married prior to their current relationships and approximately

half were now married. This was the first marriage for nine stepfathers and the first co-residential relationship for nine stepfathers. The majority of stepfathers were also biological fathers with eleven stepfathers becoming biological fathers in their stepfamilies, eight for the first time. The majority of non-resident fathers remained in contact with their children and two-thirds of stepfamilies received child support payments from non-resident fathers.

Although I made strenuous efforts to obtain a diversity of stepfathers the resulting sample was mainly white, well educated, well qualified, where almost all were in full time employment and well paid. However, I anticipated the sample would provide a rich source for analysis, the findings of which are presented in the chapters that follow. Chapters 5 and 6 will examine stepfathers' involvement in stepchildren's activities, and factors that may have shaped their involvement.

5 Stepfathers' involvement

5.1 Introduction

Within this chapter I will present the data concerning stepfathers' involvement with their stepchildren. I will outline the approach I adopted assembling and categorising the data, thus enabling me to identify and to classify stepfathers' levels of involvement. The main purpose of this classification was to assist in identifying factors that may act as preliminary indicators of stepfathers' differential involvement with their stepchildren and to provide a foundation for further detailed analysis of stepfathers' involvement. I will present some preliminary analysis of these data here. Chapters six, seven, and eight will be concerned with a detailed examination of these data and emerging themes.

5.2 A procedure to measure stepfathers' involvement

In order to identify the extent of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren across a range of activities, I asked stepfathers a variety of questions. Some questions required direct responses. One example of such a question was: 'Who [which adult] accompanies the children to their school or college activities/parents' evenings/playgroup?' (Where appropriate, questions were amended in order to relate to the relevant age group of the child/ren being discussed. In circumstances where there was more than one stepchild, I asked stepfathers to specify the stepchild to whom their response was related). And 'Who went on the last occasion?' The possible responses to both parts were: 'birth father', 'birth father and mother', 'mother', 'mother and stepfather', 'stepfather', 'other'. This assisted in identifying the general involvement of stepfathers in each activity; if they were not involved it identified who was, and

more specifically, who was involved on the last occasion. It also provided me with information on whether stepfathers were involved on their own, or if these activities were shared with their partners. Other questions asked stepfathers to identify the adult generally involved with, transporting children to and from various activities, making medical appointments, and staying at home when a child was unwell, and to identify the adult involved on the last occasion.

Other questions were open and stepfathers were invited to elaborate as fully as possible. The data that have been obtained from stepfathers' accounts of their involvement with stepchildren's activities have been drawn together from various sections of the interview schedule. This has provided a substantial base upon which to classify stepfathers by their reported involvement with stepchildren's activities. Stepfathers' responses to open questions varied. Some stepfathers provided long and detailed accounts of their involvement, some required further prompting to give a detailed account, and some gave responses that were limited to acknowledging some involvement. I was cautious not to assume that less vocal stepfathers were less involved. I sought confirmation of each stepfather's level of involvement by examining the evidence of involvement or lack of involvement from an analysis of their responses throughout the interview.

An example of an open question asked stepfathers to talk about the stepchildren's activities with which they were involved, for example, 'What sorts of things do you and the children do together (a) at home, (b) out of the home?' This provided stepfathers with an opportunity to talk, at length if they chose, about many aspects of their involvement. I followed these questions by asking stepfathers if they considered they should be more or less involved, and also asked them to consider what prevented them from being more involved than they already were.

In some circumstances, stepfathers were no longer involved in a certain activity. For example, with older stepchildren, stepfathers may not be so involved with 'taxiing', driving children to and from events. Where this was established, stepfathers were asked about their past involvement in the particular activity.

I identified and obtained data on stepfathers' involvement with activities in thirteen key areas. Six of these key activities were located 'indoors': playing indoor games, watching television, talking with stepchildren, eating together, participating in educational activities, and providing child-care at home. Seven key activities were located 'outdoors': making medical appointments and taking children to these appointments, playing sports, watching sports, going to the cinema, going to restaurants, transporting stepchildren to and from their out-of-school activities, and attending stepchildren's school events.

I created an additional category, 'other', in order to accommodate stepfathers' involvement with activities not covered by the previous categories. Activities allocated to the 'other' category were mostly leisure-oriented for example, visiting stately homes, visiting museums, going to country shows or accompanying children to the park.

Fine (1995) noted the potential for stepfathers to present their accounts in a socially desirable manner. Some stepfathers may have attempted to present themselves and their involvement with their stepchildren in the best possible terms, as several stepfathers reported that they felt they were subject to public criticism. For example, Gary said, 'I don't want to be a stepfather... because I visualise stepfathers to be "such and such" a thing.' And Jerry reported a conversation with his father-in-law in which he had said, 'Stepfathers get some bad press... we are all child killers.' I attempted to combat this potential for

response bias by using a variety of approaches to assess stepfathers' involvement. For example, after I asked stepfathers to describe their current involvement in particular activities, I specifically asked them to identify which adult was involved on the last occasion a particular event occurred. Furthermore, the extent of information provided by stepfathers throughout the interviews permitted cross-referencing of responses to questions in a form of internal corroboration.

5.3 Scoring stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's activities

Once the data were assembled for each stepfather, I then had the task of organising them in a meaningful way that would distinguish those stepfathers who were more involved from those who were less involved. To achieve this, I used a simple scoring system whereby stepfathers were awarded a score where evidence existed for their involvement with the activities described, and awarded no score where there was no evidence of any involvement. By adopting this method, I sought to organise the data objectively. As noted above, I was cautious not to assume that stepfathers who were less detailed in their discussions of involvement with activities were penalised for this. The data analysis of the responses was such that evidence of involvement was sought across a range of different questions throughout the interviews.

Initial analysis of stepfathers' responses indicated that for some activities there were degrees of involvement, while in other activities stepfathers were either 'involved' or 'not involved'. Stepfathers' responses indicated that they either were or were not involved in the following nine activities: 'playing indoor games', 'eating together', 'watching television', 'talking with stepchildren', 'providing home care for ill children', 'making medical appointments', 'watching sports', 'going to the cinema' and 'going to restaurants'. Where stepfathers were

involved with these activities, they were awarded a score of one point for involvement in each activity, and where there was no evidence of involvement, they were awarded a score of zero.

In a further five activity categories, stepfathers' accounts of their involvement indicated that there were degrees of involvement that extended from no involvement through to regular involvement. In some cases stepfathers were almost solely involved with certain activities, for example, 'educational activities', 'playing sports', 'taxiing' and 'other activities'. Where involvement in these activities was reported as taking place, stepfathers were awarded a score of one point. In cases where there was evidence of regular, frequent or sustained involvement, for example, listening to a stepchild read every night, or involvement with regular sports training sessions, a score of two points was awarded. Where there was no evidence of involvement, a score of zero was awarded. Table 8 presents a summary of each of the activity categories, the possible scores available for stepfathers' involvement with each activity, and the possible maximum scores for their involvement with indoor and outdoor activities.

Table 8: Possible scores for stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren

Stepfathers' involvement with indoor activities	Maximum Score
• Playing indoor games	1
• Watching television	1
• Talking with each stepchild	1
• Eating meals together	1
• Assisting with/supporting educational activities*	2
• Home care for ill stepchildren	<u>1</u>
<u>Total possible indoor score</u>	<u>7</u>
Stepfathers' involvement with outdoor activities	Maximum Score
• Making and/or taking to medical appointments	1
• Playing sports	2
• Watching sports	1
• Going to cinemas	1
• Going to restaurants	1
• Attending school/college events	2
• Transportation to out-of-school events	2
• Other activities**	<u>2</u>
<u>Total possible outdoor score</u>	<u>12</u>
Notes: * includes assisting with homework, reading, project research	
** includes any activities not accounted for in preceding categories	

Using a micro-social lens through which to study these stepfathers, I sought to examine the ways in which notions of stepfathering were constructed by focusing on the social processes that affected how stepfathers perceived themselves in their stepfamily situations. I sought to identify the subjective aspects of how stepfathers related to their stepchildren, and how some became more involved than others with their stepchildren. Through an examination of stepfathers' accounts of their stepfathering experiences, I sought a deeper understanding of the meanings of stepfathering than had hitherto been established. The focus of the study was the parenting practiced by stepfathers, as reported by stepfathers in different stepfamily settings. This differs from many previous studies that have relied upon mothers', or stepchildren's reports of stepfathers' parenting.

The data for this study were gathered between 1998 and 1999. I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a volunteer sample of thirty-five stepfathers living in Greater London and the South East of England. All had co-resided with their stepfamilies for at least one year and had at least one co-resident stepchild between the ages of three and nineteen years old.

5.4 Stepfathers' activity scores

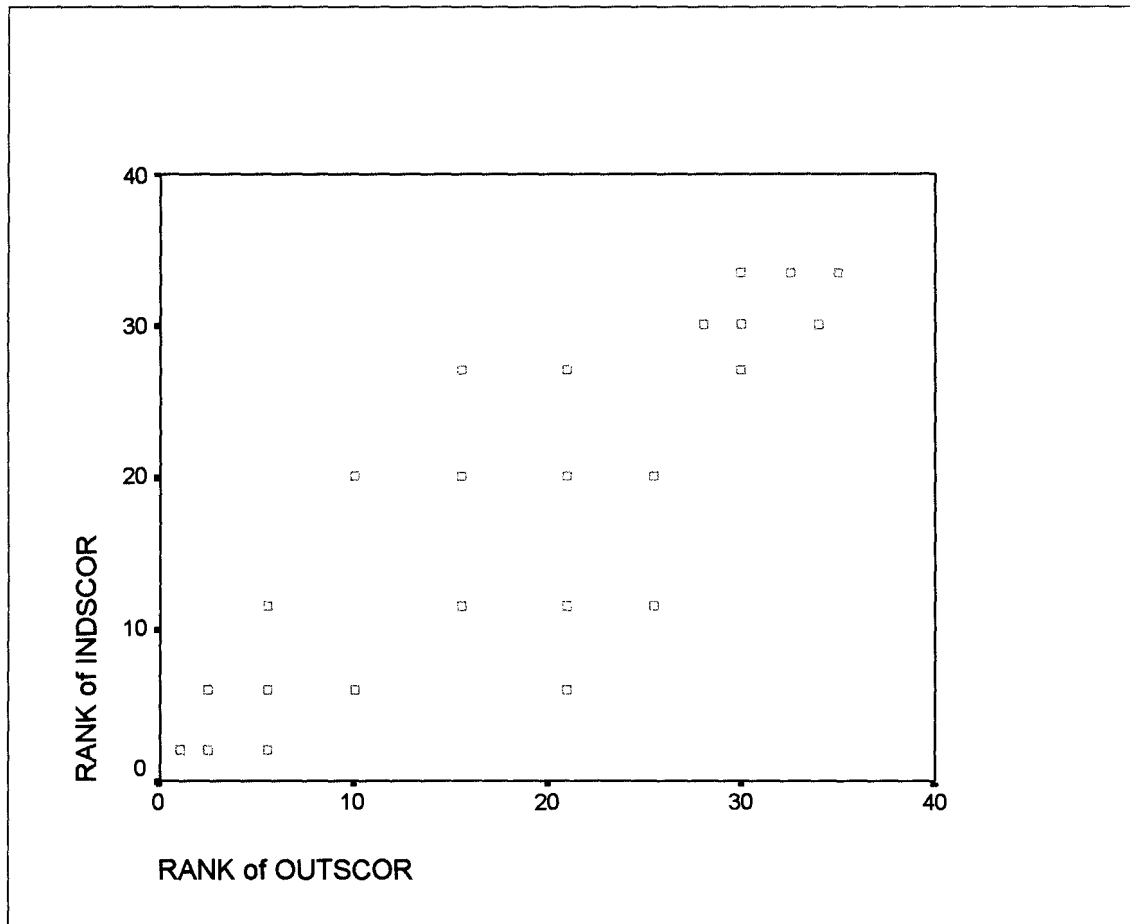
Stepfather's individual scores for their involvement with each activity were entered against that activity (see supplementary Tables I, II and III in Appendix X). This provided an overview of each stepfather's involvement and a total score for their involvement with 'indoor' activities and 'outdoor' activities. The activity scores ranged from 0 to 7 points for 'indoor' activities and from 0 to 12 points for 'outdoor' activities. Scoring stepfathers' involvement in this way enabled me to identify readily stepfathers who had been awarded lower or higher scores for their stated levels of involvement with indoor and outdoor activities, and ultimately to classify them by an overall involvement score.

Once the scores were ordered, there appeared to be an observable consistency between stepfathers' scores for involvement with 'indoor' activities and for their involvement with 'outdoor' activities; that is, stepfathers with low 'indoor' scores tended also to have low 'outdoor' scores. Similarly stepfathers with higher 'indoor' scores tended to have higher 'outdoor' scores. I tested this apparent consistency between these sets of scores with a ranked order comparison (see Figure 7).

The ranked order comparison provided two results. Firstly, both sets of scores were highly and positively correlated.¹⁸ This suggested that there was sufficient consistency between the two sets of scores to make it appropriate to combine the 'indoor' and 'outdoor' scores to produce a score for stepfathers' 'overall' involvement with stepchildren's activities.

¹⁸ $r_s=0.78$, $p<.01$

Figure 7: Ranked order comparison of indoor and outdoor activity scores



Secondly, when the 'overall' scores were ranked, a clear pattern emerged in the way these scores were distributed. The 'overall' scores fell within three distinct groupings: one group of stepfathers with scores in the lower third (scores ranging from 0-6, mean score 3.6, SD 1.5), one group of stepfathers with scores falling within the middle third (scores ranging from 7-12, mean score 8.3, SD 1.1) and one group of stepfathers with scores within the upper third (scores ranging from 13-19, mean score 15.1, SD 1.7). This enabled me to classify stepfathers with scores in the lower third as having 'low' involvement with

stepchildren's activities (9/35), those with scores in the middle third as having a 'moderate' level of involvement (18/35), and those with scores that fell within the upper third as having 'high' involvement (8/35) (see Table IV, Appendix XI for a summary of these data).

This offered a reasonably balanced set of groupings, with two smaller groups of stepfathers at the lower and higher ends of involvement and a larger group congregated around a central point, of more moderately involved stepfathers. Having categorised stepfathers by their overall levels of involvement with their stepchildren's activities, I sought initially to identify possible factors that may be linked to stepfathers' level of involvement.

5.5 Factors shaping stepfathers' involvement

I examined stepfathers' 'overall' involvement scores against a number of factors, some of which were identified from the literature review, that were potentially relevant when considering the involvement of stepfathers with stepchildren. These factors included: length of time stepfathers' partners and their children spent as lone parents prior to forming stepfamilies, stepfathers' consideration of stepchildren's needs prior to co-residence, age of stepchild when stepfathers began to co-reside, gender of stepchild, length of stepfathers' co-residence, structure of stepfamily, stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control, non-resident fathers' contact with their children, stepfathers' social class, income, and qualifications, and stepfathers' perception of the quality of their relationship with their partners.

As the sample size was small, the identified findings relate only to this group of stepfathers, and it was not the intention of this study to generalise from these findings to a larger population of stepfathers. However, the findings provided an

indication of aspects of stepfathering which warranted further detailed investigation from within this sample. The findings were based on cross-tabulations of the data with the exception of stepfathers' relationship satisfaction, which was a ranked correlation of satisfaction scores obtained from the Dyadic Satisfaction scale and 'overall' scores for stepchild involvement.

5.6 Stepfathers' involvement and stepchild's age

Taking the youngest stepchild as the target child, stepfathers with high involvement had the youngest stepchildren at the point of co-residence (mean age 4.5 years, sd 2.1, range 2-8 years). Stepfathers with low involvement had the oldest stepchildren (mean age 7.1, sd 3.8, range 2-15 years).

5.6.1 Length of time spent in lone-parent families

There was no indication from the data obtained from this sample that the length of time stepfathers' partners and children had spent living in a lone parent family setting prior to forming stepfamilies had an effect on the level of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren. However, in all eight cases where stepfathers' partners had spent four or more years living as lone parents, no stepfathers had 'high' involvement.

5.6.2 Stepfathers' consideration of stepchildren's needs prior to co-residence

Stepfathers who were more highly involved with their stepchildren's activities were more likely to have reported that they had given 'some' or 'considerable consideration' to stepchildren's needs prior to becoming co-resident¹⁹.

¹⁹ $\chi^2=8.2$, $df=2$, $p=0.05$ (Statistical associations are occasionally footnoted within the analysis. These must be interpreted with caution, as they are based on small cell sizes. They are included

5.6.3 Stepchild's gender

There appeared to be no relationship between the gender of the youngest stepchild and the level of involvement of stepfathers with stepchildren's activities. Three-fifths of stepfathers joined stepfamilies where the youngest child was female.

5.6.4 Length of stepfathers' co-residence

Almost two-thirds of stepfathers had co-resided for less than three years and one-third for more than three years. However, there was no apparent difference in stepfathers' level of involvement based on the length of their co-residence.

5.6.5 Stepfamily structure

The type of stepfamily that stepfathers formed appeared to be important. Stepfathers with high involvement were not found in 'Complex' stepfamilies, but were present only in 'Simple' or 'Simple-Plus' stepfamilies.

5.6.6 Stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control

Stepfathers who were more highly involved were also more involved with stepchildren's discipline and control²⁰. All eight stepfathers who were highly involved were also involved with discipline and control of their stepchildren, and had the support of their partners.

as indicative of observations from these data, which will require confirmation from larger, more representative samples).

²⁰ $\chi^2=10.7$, $df=2$, $p=0.01$

5.6.7 Non-resident father's contact with stepchildren

Where non-resident fathers remained in contact with their children, stepfathers were more highly involved than where non-resident fathers had lost or had little contact with their children²¹.

5.6.8 Stepfathers' social class

Although stepfathers in 'middle-class' occupations were distributed across all three involvement categories; those who were in 'working-class' occupations were not highly involved with stepchildren's activities, but had either low or moderate involvement.

5.6.9 Mode of employment

Different modes of employment for example, working for an employer or being self-employed, did not affect the ways stepfathers were involved with stepchildren.

5.6.10 Stepfathers' income

Although having a high income did not indicate that stepfathers would be highly involved with stepchildren, having a low income indicated they would not be highly involved. The six stepfathers with the lowest annual incomes (less than £20,000) had moderate or low involvement.

5.6.11 Stepfathers' qualifications

The achievement of formal qualifications did not correspond to the level of stepfathers' involvement. However, the absence of such qualifications was accompanied by a low level of involvement. (Having no formal qualifications and having low income are confounded with social class position).

²¹ $\chi^2=12.6$, $df=2$, $p=0.01$

5.6.12 Stepfathers' perceived relationship satisfaction with their partners

Stepfathers who were more involved with their stepchildren's activities perceived their relationship quality with their partners to be better than less involved stepfathers did. A modest correlation was found when stepfathers' Dyadic Satisfaction scores were ranked with their involvement scores²².

5.7 Chapter summary

Within this chapter I have described the procedure that I adopted in order to classify stepfathers initially by their reported involvement across a range of stepchildren's indoor and outdoor activities. Scoring stepfathers' involvement and plotting these scores, it emerged that stepfathers' scores fell within three distinct categories: those who were highly involved, those who were moderately involved, and those who had low involvement. I then analysed stepfathers' involvement against a number of factors that were potentially linked with their involvement and could become the basis for later, more detailed analysis. The key factors for stepfathers that I identified were: having pre-adolescent stepchildren; considering these stepchildren's needs prior to becoming co-resident; not having any children of their own from previous relationships; being involved in discipline and control; and stepchildren's non-resident fathers remaining in contact.

Stepfathers who were highly involved with their stepchildren were likely to:

- have joined stepfamilies when the youngest stepchild was under the age of eight years
- have given consideration to stepchildren's needs prior to becoming co-resident

²² Spearman's $r_s = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$

- be involved with stepchildren's discipline and control
- have stepchildren who remained in contact with their non-resident fathers
- not have any children of their own from previous relationships
- perceive their relationships with their partners to be satisfactory

Stepfathers with moderate or low involvement were likely to:

- have children from previous relationships

Stepfathers with low involvement were least likely to

- be involved in discipline and control of stepchildren
- have stepchildren who remained in contact with non-resident fathers

Stepfathers with low involvement were likely to:

- have older stepchildren at start of step-relationships
- have the lowest mean scores for their perception of their relationship quality with their partners

Although the sample was not sufficiently diverse satisfactorily to explore social class as a major determinant of stepfathers' involvement with their stepchildren, working-class stepfathers were not highly involved.

These findings obtained from researcher-driven, structural measures can only act as preliminary indicators of the influences on stepfathers' involvement. However, they will form the basis of more detailed analysis in the following chapters. In Chapter Six I will draw on stepfathers' accounts of their involvement in six areas of activity, and describe their involvement in context.

6 How were stepfathers involved?

In this chapter I will provide a detailed analysis of stepfathers' involvement in activities with stepchildren. The purpose here is to describe stepfathers' involvement in detail, with reference to their accounts of involvement. Amato and Fowler's (2002) study of parenting practices, focused on 'support, monitoring, and discipline' (2002: 703), which they regarded as central dimensions of parenting. Whilst their interest was in identifying links between parenting practices and child outcomes, I have drawn upon these dimensions and have collapsed the individual activities in Tables I-III (Appendix X) summarised in Table IV (see Appendix XI) into four sets of related activities: 'family activities', 'taxiing children', 'children's health care', 'children's educational activities'. In addition I have examined stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control and their financial involvement. I have analysed each of these dimensions in turn and identified the emerging descriptive themes.

Stepfathers' reported involvement in the activities that will be examined within this chapter are as follows:

- (a) 'family activities': the majority of stepfathers (20/35) reported some involvement in this category, which related mostly to domestic activities, for example eating meals together, watching television together, talking with stepchildren, playing indoor games, playing and watching sports. They also include activities outside the home such as visiting parks, museums or galleries.
- (b) 'children's health-care': a minority of stepfathers (14/35) reported involvement with providing care at home for stepchildren when they were ill, or

with making medical or dental appointments, and taking stepchildren to these appointments.

(c) 'taxiing children': the majority of stepfathers (24/35) said they had some involvement with taking or driving stepchildren to and from out-of-school activities, weekend hobbies, or round to friends' houses.

(d) 'children's educational activities': the majority of stepfathers (29/35) indicated they were involved with these activities, which included stepchildren's homework, school or college research activities and school or college visits.

(e) 'financial involvement': the majority of stepfathers (27/35) reported that they were responsible for, or shared the financial responsibility with their partners for mortgage/rent payments, utility bills, food and clothes shopping, and leisure activity expenses.

(f) 'discipline and control': the majority of stepfathers (30/35) reported their involvement in discipline and control of stepchildren. All of those involved verbally admonished stepchildren; a minority (7/30) had physically punished stepchildren.

6.1 Stepfathers' involvement in 'family activities'

The majority of stepfathers were in full-time employment (33/35) and away from the home during the day. (Nineteen worked in nine-to-five jobs, fourteen were self-employed or worked shifts, one worked part-time and one was unemployed.)

Although some stepfathers said they spent occasional nights away from the home, this was neither regular nor frequent; the majority said they were 'at home' most evenings, and most (20/35) reported that they were involved in some 'family activities'. This is in line with previous findings on stepfather and first-marriage families (see Ferri and Smith, 1998). For most stepfathers, evenings and weekends were the times when they were 'available' to be

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised into nine chapters. Chapter One provides a review of the relevant literature. In order to place the literature review in historical and developmental context, this chapter begins with an overview of stepfamily literature, the developments in researching and understanding stepfamilies and the various issues that affect stepfamily members, with particular reference to stepchildren and stepfathers. This is followed by a selected review of fatherhood literature which focuses on fathers' involvement and care for children. This extends to research that suggests that men can actively parent children in their care whether they are co-resident biological fathers, non-resident fathers, or social fathers. The review of stepfather literature which follows, focuses on the resources and constraints that may be relevant in seeking to identify how stepfathers' notions of stepfathering develop. This section will also highlight the challenges faced by stepfathers as they negotiate their involvement in joint activities with stepchildren.

Chapter Two presents the research aims and design, and the research questions that have arisen from the literature review. The choice of research methodology and the selection of a qualitative, cross-sectional approach for this study are discussed. Key sampling issues and the research process are also presented. I have also reflected on any implications my role as a male researcher, interviewing stepfathers, may have had on the research process.

Chapter Three details the search for and the development of an analytical and conceptual framework that draws upon a fatherhood as nurturer, and an ethic of care literature. Applying the sub-concepts of an ethic of care, taking responsibility for, making commitments to, and being sensitive to stepchildren, have been useful in understanding stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren.

involved in stepchildren's activities; they were rarely involved in activities at other times.

6.1.1 Eating together

Eating together represented an opportunity for stepfathers and stepchildren to talk and to share in a social, household practice. Although many stepfathers said that they considered eating together with stepchildren to be important either in terms of family representation, symbolising 'family life', or simply based on the practicalities of cooking for the family, the majority of stepfathers only achieved this at weekends, or on occasional evenings during the week.

Only two stepfathers said that they made a point of being at home every evening to eat with their families (Jimmy; Derek). Both said it provided an opportunity for the family members to talk to each other. This differs from Ferri and Smith's (1998) findings, where approximately two-thirds of stepfathers and first-marriage families ate together at least once-a-day.

Jimmy (referred to above, see Figure 5), explained that he made a point of being home every evening to eat with his partner and children. He said he regarded this as an important aspect of his 'family life'. Jimmy said that he, his partner, her three children and their subsequent child ate together in their little sitting room, which contained a small dining table, a television and a sofa. The dining table was only large enough to accommodate the children. Both Jimmy and his partner sat on the sofa in order that they ate at the same time and in the same room as the children²³. Jimmy said the television was always on at meal times. They all watched what was on television, talked about it, or talked over it. The

²³ As the interview with Jimmy took place in the sitting room I can confirm that it is as small and cramped as he described.

evening meal, eaten together, presented a daily opportunity for everyone to get together.

Derek, a self-employed businessman, married for three years with two teenage stepsons aged fourteen and sixteen, described eating together as being practical, and represented 'a traditional way for families to get together'. He said, 'It's a good time to talk. You've all finished a day, theirs at school [stepchildren]. You can have a chat and involve everybody.'

The most frequent reason stepfathers gave for their absence from meals with their stepchildren was their own work commitments. These work commitments meant that stepfathers often returned home in the evenings after stepchildren had eaten. Where this was the case, stepfathers said they made a point of being available to eat 'as a family' on Sundays, either at breakfast or at lunch.

Rhyss had cohabited for two years of a four-year relationship, and had twin stepdaughters aged ten and a fourteen-month-old daughter. He said that although he did not return from work until seven in the evening, by which time the stepchildren had eaten, it was 'important to spend that time together as a family'. Referring to eating together at the weekend, he said, 'I think the important thing is that we are all doing something together. It's not actually very important what it is, the important thing is that we are all participating in and sharing in, so when we do that we [Rhyss and partner] get the girls involved in setting the table and helping out a bit as much as they can around the kitchen.' However, as the stepchildren spent every other weekend with their non-resident father, this limited the time that he had to spend with the stepchildren. Rhyss said, 'I would like the opportunity to get more involved with them. What that would actually mean I don't know. I guess I would like to rather than I should. I don't beat myself up about it by thinking I'm letting them down.'

Rapoport et al. (1977) indicated that the nature of parental involvement changes as children mature and develop; pre-adolescent stepchildren were likely to have different involvement requirements to those who were adolescent (see Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Stepfathers talked about their differential involvement with stepchildren of different ages. They indicated that they were often more involved with younger stepchildren who were more dependent, and less involved with older stepchildren who were often more likely to be involved with their own commitments, friends and other activities. Adolescent stepchildren were reported to eat with the rest of their families less frequently than pre-adolescent children. Two stepfathers provided examples of their experiences with stepchildren of different ages.

Frank, a police constable, married for two years with three stepchildren aged seven, thirteen and sixteen, explained that the children all ate around five o'clock. He returned later from work and he and his wife ate together. However, he said that when he was there during the weekends he made more of an effort for all to eat together. He said, 'Sunday lunch is a big one for us... we can all sit down and talk together.' Although the eldest stepdaughter (age 16) tried to avoid family lunch, Frank said that between him and his wife they were occasionally able to encourage her to join them.

Bernard, a theatre manager, had co-resided for three years and had four stepsons aged from eighteen to twenty-four. Bernard said that as a result of working patterns (Bernard worked full time and his partner worked shifts), and the stepchildren's own commitments, there were few opportunities during the week to be together, and Sundays occasionally provided that opportunity. He said, 'If we are together on a Sunday I really like to get round the table and talk about all sorts of things'.

Although most stepfathers regarded eating together as a good family practice, it rarely happened on a regular basis. Children's meals were mostly organised and co-ordinated by their mothers, and the majority of children ate before stepfathers returned home. Adolescent children often made their own meal arrangements. Constraints of work were used in order to excuse them from involvement with this activity.

6.1.2 Playing games with children

Stepfathers' involvement with playing indoor games appeared to be dependent upon their own availability, and their choice of when they would be involved, although this referred mostly to younger stepchildren. Older stepchildren tended to be more involved with their own commitments.

Examples of stepfathers with different approaches to playing games with stepchildren were provided by: Gary, who described his regular involvement; Allan, who described his occasional involvement; and by Darren, who described his postponed involvement. Whilst each account is different in its own way, they are similar in that they indicate stepfathers' ability to choose when to be involved with stepchildren.

Gary, a self-employed businessman, had co-resided on a part-time basis for three years. He had one stepdaughter aged seven and one stepson aged twelve. Gary said that he regularly allocated time at the weekends to play board games with both children; Saturday evening with the stepdaughter and Sunday evening with the stepson, 'after dinner and pre-bed'. Although these games could only take place once any work Gary had to complete was finished, and after the children had completed their household chores, he said, 'part of [the] weekend must be time together, time with the children, time for the children as

individuals.’ Gary said that he considered that he was involved with the stepchildren ‘a reasonable amount given I am not here all of the time’. He said he could do more, but added, ‘I don’t beat myself up about it.’

Allan, an electrician, had co-resided for three years and had two stepchildren aged thirteen and seventeen. He said he occasionally played games with the younger stepchild. ‘The eldest is very much doing ’is own thing at the moment. The other one, yeah, sometimes, not often, we will ’ave a games evenin’.’ However, it later became apparent that these ‘games evenings’ only occurred when Allan’s non-resident son from a previous relationship came to stay over.

Darren, an educational trainer, married for two years with a stepdaughter aged six, provided a further indication of stepfathers’ ability to choose when to be involved. He described how he had attempted to play board games with his stepdaughter but had given up because he was frustrated by the way she would not follow the rules. He said: ‘I might try and teach her when she’s a bit older.’

6.1.3 Stepfathers’ involvement with children’s educational activities

Many stepfathers reported their involvement with a wide range of stepchildren’s educational activities. For example, with pre-school age children, some stepfathers were involved with teaching reading and writing skills at home, or taking children to and collecting them from nurseries. With school-age children, many stepfathers were involved at home, with listening to children reading, helping them with their homework and with their school projects, and they accompanied children to libraries and attended parents’ events at schools. In cases where stepchildren were older and at college, some stepfathers said they were involved in assisting with research projects, discussing issues and attending shows or other events at colleges.

Of those stepfathers involved with stepchildren's educational activities (22/35), eight indicated that they had taken a central role with regard to aspects of children's educational support at home. This could include, reading with a child on a daily basis, identifying an academic subject in which a stepfather had particular strengths, becoming the adult to whom the child referred with questions on a particular subject, or being responsible for taking children to libraries for their research. I have examined these events in more detail below.

6.1.3.1 Assisting with children's homework

Although some stepfathers had only moderate levels of involvement, others were extensively involved with stepchildren's homework. For example, Terry, a detective constable, married for one year with a six-year-old stepson, said a school report had indicated the child had problems with word association and difficulty learning to read. Terry said that he had changed his work pattern in order to be more involved with his stepson's educational needs. He had reduced the number of hours he worked, and was now at home every day when the child returned from school in order to support him with his reading. Terry said that over the previous nine months since he started to spend more time with the child there had been improvements in his skills: 'he is now reading some very difficult books.'

Jerry, a computer specialist, married for one year with two stepsons aged twelve and nine and a stepdaughter aged five, said that he and his wife shared the children's homework support according to their own skills. The children consulted their mother for English support and Jerry for Maths and Science support. He explained the central role he had taken for the stepchildren's studies in that he was 'very insistent' that all three children completed their homework, and he monitored their progress.

However, assisting children with homework was not restricted only to those stepfathers who themselves had achieved formal academic qualifications. Two stepfathers explained how they were involved with stepchildren's education at home despite having achieved fewer formal qualifications than their stepchildren. Jimmy (referred to above, see Figure 5), said that despite having poor reading and writing skills and having left school with no qualifications, he helped the stepchildren where he could, particularly with their maths, at which he claimed to be competent.

Derek (referred to above, see 6.1.1), said that he avoided involvement with the stepchildren's education because his qualifications fell far short of the achievement of his stepchildren. He compared his eldest stepchild's achievement to his own when he said his stepson gained 'thirteen GCSE's many with 'A' stars, so my two don't compare at all.' However, Derek said that his computer skills had enabled him to be involved in some aspects of the stepchildren's schoolwork. He described assisting his stepsons with a school project related to writing and playing music. He said he helped them to develop a music program on the computer.

Not all stepfathers were so involved in stepchildren's homework activities. Gilbert, a marine consultant who had been married for five years with two stepsons aged eleven and thirteen, said that he was not involved a great deal with stepchildren's activities. He said the stepchildren had their own things to do, including homework, while he had his own things to do, such as household chores and visiting his mother. 'I must admit', he added, 'I do enjoy having a quiet day at weekends.'

6.1.3.2 Attending children's school events

Although the majority of stepfathers reported that they attended stepchildren's school events (19/35), this was an activity entirely shared with their partners. Stepfathers did not attend school events on their own. The only exception reported was when a stepfather's wife had gone into labour and was admitted to hospital on the day a parents' evening was scheduled.

Of the sixteen stepfamilies in which the stepfathers did not attend stepchildren's school events, ten stepfathers' partners attended alone, and in six cases, stepfathers' partners attended accompanied by the children's non-resident fathers. None of these sixteen stepfathers said that they had been prevented from attending. However, where stepfathers reported the involvement of children's non-resident fathers, this was cited as the reason for their non-attendance. In each of these six cases stepfathers said they did not attend on the grounds that it would cause less conflict, or be less confusing for the children, if they stayed away. This did not prevent them from being involved in other ways, and they provided examples of the other ways they supported their stepchildren's education. These included, meeting stepchildren's teachers at other times to discuss stepchildren's progress, involvement with decisions about which school stepchildren would attend, paying for school fees and reading school reports. Gary (referred to above, see 6.1.2) summarised the position of these stepfathers when he said:

I would quite happily [attend school events]. Pete, the children's father, who lives [20 minutes away], he's interested in attending and I think it becomes a little confusing if the father, potential father and wife turn up. So as long as the children's interests are represented there, and the information all comes back to me... I don't have a problem with that.

Louis, an IT consultant, married for two years with a nine-year-old stepdaughter, described his involvement with the choice of school that his stepdaughter was going to attend. He said that since the private school that she had previously attended had become co-educational, he and his wife had become less pleased with the situation and had agreed that she should change school. Referring to the new school, Louis said:

So I'd been there [at the school] and part of the discussions we'd [Louis and his wife] had with them [new school], I was involved with, so I was part of that, which was good. Just before the end of term Geraldine [wife] took P... [stepdaughter] up there for a visit and P... was accepted. I went up there afterwards to meet the head of the lower school and her form teacher to be, so was involved with everything that was going on really.

Although Louis had not been solely involved in the decision-making process about the change of school, he was closely involved with his wife and had made visits to the child's previous and prospective schools unaccompanied by his wife. The child's father, who remained in contact with the child, was not involved in this process.

None of the stepfathers in this study talked about their lack of legal authority (in terms of the Children Act, 1989) to receive information about their stepchildren's educational progress, discuss stepchildren's progress with teachers, or to take decisions about or to be party to decisions regarding stepchildren's education²⁴.

²⁴ The 1993 Education Act states that individuals holding parental responsibility, or in 'actual care' of that child, are entitled to the relevant rights in relation to that child's education. This incorporates step-parents...and theoretically entitles them to make a number of choices with regard to children's education (Edwards et al., 1999a: 83).

6.1.4 'Taxiing children'

The majority of stepfathers (24/35), reported being involved in transporting stepchildren to and from out-of-school events, after-school activities, sporting events and hobbies. This activity was mostly shared between stepfathers and their partners (19/24) and tended to be based on who was available at the required time. Only five stepfathers (5/24) reported sole responsibility for driving children. The reason that most of them offered was that their partner did not drive (3/5). Of the remaining stepfathers, one said that because his stepson was heavily sports oriented, which he wished to support and encourage, he did the driving; the other said it provided him with an opportunity to spend time on his own with his stepdaughters.

Many of the stepfathers said their shared involvement with transporting stepchildren was a means of supporting their partners. Alf's comments were typical of many of these stepfathers. A College manager who had cohabited for one year and had two stepsons aged ten and thirteen, Alf described his introduction to driving the children after he began to co-reside. He said that although his partner did much of the driving, over the course of the year she had gradually involved him more, and he equated this with being 'given more responsibility' for the stepchildren. Most of the driving that Alf undertook occurred during the evenings or at the weekend. This coincided with the times his partner worked and with the times that Alf was available. Alf also said that he had regularly accompanied his partner when she had driven the children to their fortnightly meeting with their non-resident father. However, as his partner was due to work the following weekend, Alf said he was going to be solely responsible for undertaking that journey with the stepchildren for the first time.

Almost one third of stepfathers were not involved in taxiing stepchildren. This non-involvement was explained either by their lack of availability because of work commitments, or by what was referred to by two stepfathers as 'systems'

Chapter Four presents the demographic characteristics of the sample in terms of social class, ethnicity, employment and income. The types of stepfamilies that have been formed in terms of structure, marriage, and age and gender of children are also presented. Biographies of the sample stepfathers are referred to here and are presented in full in Appendix XIV.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven are linked and examine stepfathers' involvement. Chapter Five presents the method I employed in order to categorise stepfathers' involvement across a range of practical activities. A number of factors that may have implications for the level of stepfathers' involvement are examined. Chapter Six presents an analysis of stepfathers' accounts of their involvement. Involvement with discipline and control of stepchildren, and the ways in which this is negotiated with stepfathers' partners is also examined. Chapter Seven extends the analysis of stepfathers' involvement and examines stepfathers' experiences of fathering. This focuses on stepfathers' relationships with their own fathers, during childhood and adolescence, and stepfathers' experience of fatherhood in previous and/or current relationships.

Chapter Eight draws on all the available research evidence obtained by the study and presents three 'images' of stepfathering: 'Co-operative caretakers', 'Traditionalists', and 'Mum's boyfriends'. These images identify the ways in which the key concepts of taking responsibilities for, making commitments to, and being sensitive to stepchildren are fundamental aspects of stepfathering and assist with an identification of stepfathering.

The final chapter draws together the main findings from the study, and presents a discussion of the limitations and strengths of the study. The significant findings from the study, the contribution this makes to the literature on

that children's mothers had in place prior to the start of stepfathers' co-residence. Chris, a self-employed educational consultant, who had cohabited for one year and had a stepdaughter aged eight, provided an example of stepfathers who had no involvement with these duties. Although he had accompanied his partner when the child had been dropped off or collected from her meetings with her non-resident father, Chris had never been solely involved in those events. Despite having cohabited for one year of a five-year relationship, working less hours per week than his partner and being self-employed while his partner worked nine-to-five, he said that his partner did all the 'school runs and after-school pick-ups'. The reason he gave for his lack of involvement was that his partner had 'systems' in place and these systems had worked 'like a well oiled machine' during the five years his partner had lived alone with her daughter.

Although some stepfathers said they had occasionally taken children to school or collected them from school when their shifts or work patterns permitted, none said they were involved with the 'school run'. When stepfathers talked about their involvement in transporting stepchildren, they referred to out-of-school activities, for example taking stepchildren to the stables at the weekend, to sporting events, or collecting children from after-school events. The majority of stepfathers who were involved talked about their involvement occurring when they were available to assist or support their partners. They did not talk about their involvement with the essential daily activities of taking children to, or collecting them from, school.

6.1.5 Children's healthcare activities

In all cases stepfathers' partners/wives were reported to be the primary care givers. A minority of stepfathers (14/35) were involved with stepchildren's healthcare. Most of these 'involved stepfathers' shared the healthcare activities

with their partners where their work commitments permitted or where their partners experienced more difficulty taking time off from their employment. Stepfathers were unlikely to take time off from work to care for a stepchild who had stayed off school due to ill-health. Although thirteen stepfathers reported that they had at least on one occasion provided some form of childcare, only five had been involved with taking stepchildren to medical appointments. Where mothers were not in paid employment, stepfathers reported no involvement with any healthcare activities. When asked about their share of overall domestic responsibilities, the majority of stepfathers (25/35) acknowledged their partners had a greater share, whilst ten considered that they shared these responsibilities equally.

Two examples highlight the ways in which stepfathers were involved. Frank, (referred to above, see 6.1.1), said that working shifts meant that he could change his hours to suit the needs of the family. As his wife also worked, it was helpful that he was able to share childcare responsibilities with her. When one of the children had been ill and confined to bed for a week, he shared the care with his wife,

Taking things up, being watched and checked and what not, we did a dual role on that. I went upstairs as much as Lisa [wife]. I don't find any problems with that.

He added that he had recently re-arranged his shifts in order to take his stepson to a forthcoming hospital appointment.

O.. [stepson] has got an appointment at hospital for a kidney scan and I'll be taking him to that because Lisa's working, so it's easier for me to take a day off really. I took him to the doctors the other day and I'm quite happy to take them [stepchildren] to the doctors and dentists, if Lisa's unavailable.

Ben, who had cohabited for eighteen months and had two stepsons aged five and ten, also described his involvement with a stepchild and hospital appointments. Ben worked as a disability counsellor and was registered disabled. He explained this as the basis of his interest in his eldest stepson's disability. Ben accompanied the child to appointments with his orthopaedic surgeon and said he had taken an 'active role' in ensuring that the child did his therapeutic exercises regularly. Ben added that being self-employed made it easier for him to move his own appointments than it was for his partner to take time off work.

Although Ben and Frank were exceptional in taking an active part in stepchildren's healthcare, there were several contextual reasons for their involvement. Ben had a personal knowledge of disability issues through his own disability and work, and his work schedule was more flexible than his partner's. Frank also referred to his employment as being more flexible than his wife's but his involvement was more typical of most stepfathers in that it was secondary to, and in the main shared with, that of the child's mother. Stepfathers involved with taking stepchildren to medical appointments did not talk about or otherwise indicate that they were aware of any lack of legal authority on their part to take decisions on behalf of their stepchildren's health care, or to be involved in negotiating treatment regimes for their stepchildren. Nor did they indicate that the legality of their involvement had been raised as an issue by any of the medical profession that they had been involved with as a result of taking stepchildren to medical appointments. I asked stepfathers if they had experienced any problems with medical appointments. They replied that they only experienced any difficulty at first, but this did not continue once the staff concerned had become used to the different surnames used by stepfathers and stepchildren.

The fact that most did not undertake this type of health activity with their stepchildren, however, suggested that the institutional barriers were effective and that, perhaps more importantly, mothers considered this to be their job. Instead, the most frequently cited reason stepfathers gave for their lack of involvement was their own work commitments. Arnold for example, a manager with a telephone company, married for seven years with one stepson aged eighteen, one stepdaughter aged fourteen and his own co-resident daughter aged fifteen, said that it was not easy for him to be involved in taking children to medical appointments, which were likely to be made by his wife immediately after school and before he came home from work.

Although the majority of stepfathers' partners (28/35) were also in paid employment, children's healthcare remained their responsibility. Alf (referred to above, see 6.1.4) summarised the situation for most of the stepfathers as follows: 'the significant child-care responsibility lies with Karen [children's mother] and not with me.' Moreover children had often spent some years living alone with their mothers, further reinforcing the mother-child bond. Russ, a financial consultant, married for two years with three stepchildren aged nine, eleven and nineteen, and two children of his own from his previous marriage aged nine and twelve, explained that his wife had retained responsibility for her three children's medical requirements and he had retained responsibility for his two children's medical needs. Furthermore, as the children continued to see the doctors and dentists that they had prior to co-residing, he said he saw no reason to change. Derek (referred to above, see 6.1.1) summarised the situation for several stepfathers who reported little or no involvement in their stepchildren's health care:

I wouldn't really get involved. I just find that they [stepchildren] have their own lives really, and I have mine. I don't know their complete medical histories all the way through. We tend to look after ourselves really, but Helen [wife] runs around all of us. So, I'm not involved when

they're ill so much, but if it was serious then I would be involved. I think I will do when I have my own children.

Although most stepfathers indicated that involvement with children's healthcare was part of parenting, they distanced themselves from daily involvement. This was underlined by Gary (referred to above, see 6.1.2), who was partially co-resident when he said, 'I would only be involved in caring for them, if it fell on the days of the week that I'm here.'

Williams, in her study of young people with chronic illness found that mothers were seen as 'particularly responsible for managing any illness in their children' (Williams, 2002: 114). Stepfathers' accounts suggested that the majority could be involved in extraordinary circumstances or where children's health-care needs fitted with their work patterns. Derek suggested that he would be there for his stepchildren (or to support his wife) if one of the stepchildren became seriously ill.

When asked about their overall share of domestic activities, the majority (25/35) acknowledged that their partners had a greater share of these activities. Ten said they shared domestic activities equally with their partners. This is in line with previous studies which identified that between one quarter and two fifths of stepfathers shared domestic responsibilities with their partners (Bray et al, 1994; Robertson, 2004).

6.2 Stepfathers' financial involvement

Providing materially for stepchildren through work and generating income involved a large part of the majority of stepfathers' time, resources and energies. In the majority of cases (28/35), stepfathers were the largest income earners in

the step-household, and most stepfathers were in full time employment (33/35), while one worked part-time and one was unemployed. In order to establish the extent of stepfathers' financial involvement, I asked a series of questions that related to the adult who had responsibility for paying for a range of household expenditure, mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, household repairs, food, children's clothing and leisure activities. (Table 9 presents a summary of these findings).

Table 9: Adult with reported responsibility for household expenditure

		Adult with financial responsibility			
		Stepfather	Shared	Partner	Totals
Type of household expenditure	Mortgage/rent	15	11	9	35
	Utilities	14	13	8	35
	Household repairs	16	13	6	35
	Food	12	15	8	35
	Children's clothes	7	15	13	35
	Leisure	12	21	2	35

Although the type of stepfather family that had been formed did not have an apparent bearing on whether stepfathers took or shared responsibility for any of these expenses, stepfathers' marital status and house ownership were important. In line with previous findings (see Pahl, 1989), male partners tended to be higher earners than female partners, and were responsible for paying the main bills such as mortgages, rents and household bills. Female partners, with their smaller incomes, tended to be responsible for purchasing lesser value items, in this case, children's clothes and food.

Marital status

- All married stepfathers (18/18) took or shared responsibility with their wives for mortgage payments and utility bills compared to less than half of cohabiting stepfathers (8/17)
- All married stepfathers shared or paid for household repairs, as did a majority of cohabiting stepfathers (11/17)
- The majority of married stepfathers took or shared responsibility for food purchases (16/18), as did a majority of cohabiting stepfathers (11/17)
- A majority of married stepfathers (17/18) took responsibility or contributed to the purchase of stepchildren's clothes, while only a minority of cohabiting stepfathers did (6/17)

House ownership

- Where the property title was held solely by stepfathers, the majority of stepfathers (9/10 were solely responsible) for rent/mortgage payments (See Table 10 below)
- Where the title of the house was in stepfathers' partners' names, a minority of stepfathers (2/14) were solely responsible for the mortgage or rent payments, and a further three shared these payments with their partners
- Where the title was shared, the responsibility for the rent or mortgage payments was also shared by the majority of stepfathers (7/11); only four were solely responsible

Table 10: House ownership and responsibility for mortgage/rent payments

House ownership/tenancy		Responsible for mortgage/rent payments			Total
		Stepfather	Shared	Partner	
	SFs' partner	2	3	9	14
	Shared	4	7	0	11
	Stepfather	9	1	0	10
Total		15	11	9	35

6.2.1 Stepfathers wholly involved in contributing towards step-household expenditure

Russ (referred to above, see 6.1.5) said that 'spending the money on the family is why it's there.' Following his marriage, Russ' wife and stepchildren moved into his existing home. At that time, he said, he converted the mortgage into joint ownership, and he and his wife wrote wills that left everything equally to all the children (his two children from his previous marriage and his four stepchildren). He explained that as his wife did not go out to work, she was responsible for all the household chores; he took no part in these. As he drove to work and passed a supermarket on the way, he did all the food shopping and brought it back by car. Russ was responsible for all the financial expenditure and took all the major financial decisions for the household.

Whenever there is a problem, or whenever we have three things to buy and only the money for one of them, then I have to sit her down and say, 'I know we wanted to do this and that, but we are going to have to decide which we can afford to do this month'. And if we plan something big, like decorate a room, then I will say, 'I think we can afford to do that in April.' So we do it in April.

Tom, a self-employed fashion photographer, had co-resided for two and a half years, and had been married for the past four months. He had two

stepdaughters aged six and eight. He explained his financial involvement as 'total'. His wife was currently not in employment, and not in receipt of any child support payments. Tom had bought the house that he, his wife and stepchildren currently lived in; there was no mortgage. Although the property was in his name, he said that if his relationship with his wife broke down, she and her children would remain in the house, which would become theirs, and he would move away. In addition to meeting all the household expenditure, Tom also paid the school fees for both stepdaughters. He summed up his financial involvement with his stepchildren as 'pretty much providing for all their needs'.

Jimmy (referred to above, see Figure 5), had a much smaller income than either Tom or Russ, and his partner rented the house from the council. His partner was only employed on a part-time basis in cleaning jobs. However, he explained that he shared the household finances fully with his partner:

What I earn goes in a pot, if she [partner] earns anything, it goes in a pot, and we pay for things from that... I wouldn't say we were well off, we're just steady. Sometimes we hit a hill or a mountain, but we climb over it. At the end of the day, if I have to, I'll do a bit of mini-cabbing, and it gets us over the hill and gets us a little bit of money. Then I stop.

6.2.2 Stepfathers partially involved in contributing towards step-household expenditure

Five stepfathers limited their financial involvement to making a financial contribution towards household expenditure, rather than taking responsibility for a particular expense. They referred to their own financial commitments, for example, to children from previous relationships, or owning and maintaining their own properties, that prevented them from making a greater commitment to the step-household.

Allan (referred to previously, see 6.1.2), who had cohabited for three years, said that he contributed a greater share than his partner to food and utility bills. Although his partner was not in employment and was not in receipt of any child support payments, she was solely responsible for the rent, household repairs, and paying for children's clothes. Allan explained that he had to buy clothes for his two non-resident children from previous relationships; he paid for their annual holiday and provided them with regular pocket money. Allan did recognise the limited financial contribution that he made to the step-household, and explained this as follows:

A reason I don't do a lot for Carrie's [partner] house is, twice now I've owned a house in Brighton, completely did the whole thing out, and things didn't work out. So, insecurity is a reason for my lack of commitment. I'm not gonna get caught again, sort of thing, and I feel sorry for Carrie, because she doesn't deserve it. I really do feel that I should be putting more in because she's been so understanding. I should really start to put more money into the place, if I 'ad it, which I 'aven't. Even if I 'ad, it would probably go on my kids or drink.

Four stepfathers (Matt, Alf, Chris and Gary) maintained their own properties elsewhere and demonstrated limited financial involvement in the step-household.

Matt, unemployed, had cohabited for two years in his partner's house along with her two stepchildren aged nine and fifteen. He said he contributed £70 to the weekly food shopping. Although he said he had occasionally helped his partner financially, 'with the odd bill in the past', he explained that owning his own house prevented him from contributing financially to the step-household to a greater extent than he did. He said, 'Well, I 'ave my own mortgage to pay an' my own bills, so she [partner] pays hers and I pay mine. If I didn't 'ave me own 'ouse, I would 'elp to pay for things 'ere [the step-household].'

stepfathers, and suggestions are presented for theory, policy and practice. Specific areas for future research that may build on these findings are also suggested.

Alf (discussed above, see 6.1.4), had cohabited with his partner and her two children, in her house, for one year. He also had his own property, which he said was rented out. Although Alf's income was three and a half times his partner's income, he said he contributed £100 each week to the step-household food budget. His partner had a greater responsibility for all the other expenses. 'By and large our finances are separate... All the bills are Diane's [partner] with the exception of food, [which is shared] fifty-fifty. Entertainment is totally down to me. Holidays are down to me, and petrol if we went somewhere as a family then it would be down to me.'

Chris (discussed above, see 6.1.4), had cohabited for one year in his partner's house. He also maintained his own flat elsewhere which he rented out. Although he and his partner had joint accounts, his partner contributed a greater share than he did, and had a greater responsibility for all the household expenditure. Chris explained this was because his partner earned more than he did and her monthly salary was more secure than his variable income as a consultant. Chris added that his own flat was in negative equity and he did not make any money from the rental income.

Gary (referred to above, see 6.1.2) had cohabited, on a part-time basis, in his partner's house for three years. He maintained his own flat elsewhere, and his finances were kept separate from his partner's. Although Gary's partner was in part-time employment and in receipt of child support payments, his income was three times his partner's income. Gary said that his current financial involvement was limited to paying for leisure activities only. His partner was responsible for all other household expenses. Although he said he had previously helped with some decoration in the house by supplying his labour, his partner had purchased all the materials.

There are similarities between the reluctance expressed by these cohabiting stepfathers, none of whom had joint children with their partners, in taking on a provider role in new relationships, with the findings of Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) study, where men in cohabiting relationships were reluctant to make financial commitments.

6.3 Stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control

Previous research has found that biological fathers become progressively less involved with their own children's activities during adolescence, closeness declines, and conflict increases (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Marsiglio, 1991). Conflict also increases between stepfathers and stepchildren during adolescence (Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992), and stepfathers' involvement has been found to reduce more rapidly than that of biological fathers (Stewart, 2005). Hetherington et al. (1998) identified that increased conflict between stepfathers and stepchildren could result from stepfathers' attempts at disciplining and controlling stepchildren. This suggests that stepfather-stepchild relations were likely to be improved in situations where stepfathers refrained from involvement with discipline and control. Although mothers have the main role in punishing and controlling children, recent research indicated that the majority of step-parents were involved and 'exercised control when necessary' (Smith et al., 2001: 103).

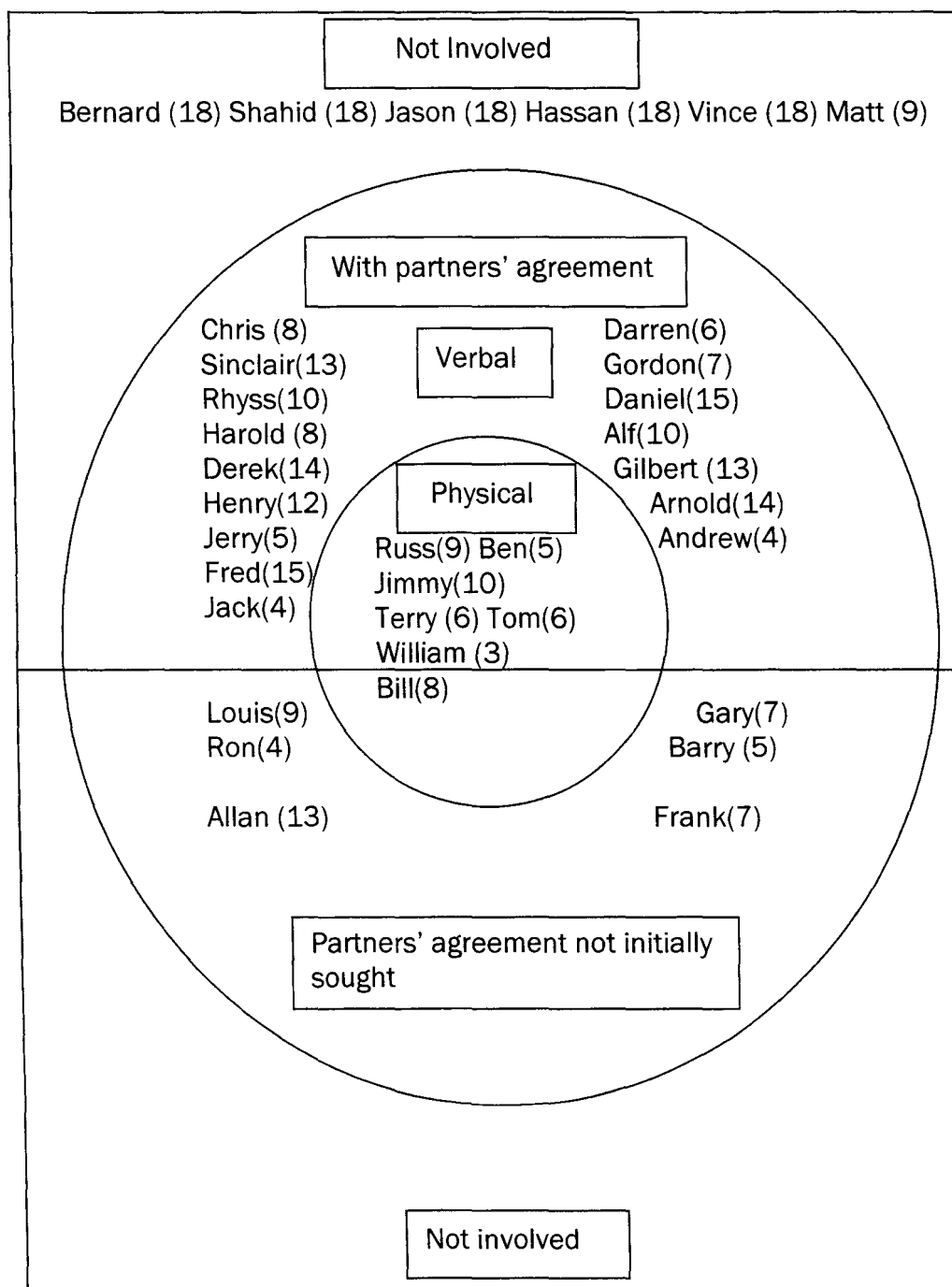
Within this section I will explore stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control. The main aspects of stepfathers' involvement that I have focused on were the process of their involvement, the ways in which their involvement was sanctioned and constrained by others, mostly their partners,

and factors that stepfathers considered were indicators of their authority or legitimacy to be involved with discipline and control issues.

Key findings about stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control from this study were as follows:

- The majority of stepfathers (29/35) were involved with stepchildren's discipline and control
- A small number of stepfathers involved with discipline and control (7/29) said they were also involved with administering physical punishment in terms of giving stepchildren 'the occasional smack' (see Table 11)
- The majority of stepfathers' involvement was with the prior agreement of their partners (26/29). Four had not discussed their involvement with their partners prior to becoming involved
- The majority of stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control took place where non-resident fathers remained in contact with their children (23/29)

Table 11: Stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control and age of youngest stepchild



Note: Age of youngest stepchild given in brackets.

6.3.1 Stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control

Age was a factor in the type of involvement stepfathers had with stepchildren. The majority of stepfathers with stepchildren aged eighteen were not involved with discipline and control (8/9). The one stepfather who was involved (Henry, discussed below, 6.3.5) experienced conflict with his stepson as a result of his involvement. Stepfathers' involvement with physical discipline and control was reported only with stepchildren under the age of eleven. However, this only represented a minority of stepfathers with stepchildren under eleven (7/22).

The ways in which stepfathers reported their involvement were by providing support to their partners through reinforcement of previously set rules, verbal admonishment, 'telling off', shouting, issuing 'groundings', or giving the 'occasional smack'.

Some stepfathers had become involved with disciplining children without having explicitly discussed their involvement with their partners; all had subsequently done so following incidents of their disciplinary involvement. These discussions were reported to have resulted in stepfathers amending their involvement in accordance with their partners' wishes. In response to a direct question, the majority of stepfathers said they were satisfied with their current level of involvement or non-involvement (34/35); only one stepfather was dissatisfied and said he had 'too little' involvement.

Stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control appeared to be based on their perception that their involvement was either 'legitimate', or that they had the 'authority' to be involved. These perceptions were reinforced by already being a father to children from previous relationships, co-residence in the stepfamily home, marriage to their stepchildren's mother, being asked to be

involved by their partners, or having sought their partners' approval to be involved, and by the perception that non-resident fathers did not discipline or control children appropriately. Once stepfathers perceived that they had obtained 'authority', it appeared to be important to them to retain their partners' confidence in their involvement with discipline and control through a process of negotiation. I have examined stepfathers' involvement in these negotiations with their partners in relation to co-residence, marriage, and non-resident fathers' perceived lack of involvement. I have also examined stepfathers' continued involvement in discipline and control of adolescent stepchildren, and stepfathers' non-involvement.

6.3.2 Co-residence and marriage

The majority of stepfathers became involved with discipline and control gradually, over time. This process of involvement often began or was enhanced by specific changes in stepfathers' relationships with their partners, such as cohabitation or marriage. Stepfathers' marriage to their partners and/or co-residence in the stepfamily home was symbolic of making commitments to their partners and their partners' children and was regarded as essential by stepfathers in 'legitimising' their involvement, or giving them 'authority' to be involved with discipline and control issues. As noted in previous research (Marsiglio, 2004), many stepfathers regarded their relationships with their partners as including their partners' children. Several stepfathers in this study said their current relationships differed from their experiences of previous relationships where they had only considered themselves and their partners. Daniel, for example, said: 'It was very much a case of, as I said to my [prospective] father-in-law at the time, "a package deal". If I had a relationship with Jayne [partner], then A..[stepdaughter], although not necessarily involved in the relationship from the point of view of being anything other than a child, still

had to be considered, from my point of view.’ Jack explained his thoughts at the time of his developing relationship with his partner and her young daughter in similar terms. He said:

[I] had to feel very sure that I wanted to have a relationship with them [partner and her daughter]. And I think of it that way. I got into it thinking of having a relationship with them, and not so much as with Steph [partner]. That was the only fair way to do it. And I guess I had to make a decision really of quite a high level of commitment.

Two accounts typified the discussions stepfathers had with their partners, and indicated the relevance of becoming co-resident to stepfathers’ involvement with discipline and control. Jerry (discussed above see 6.1.3.1) began to cohabit three months into the relationship with his partner Janice. It was at this point, he said, that he asked Janice how she wanted him to be involved with her three children. Jerry said that his partner ‘was adamant’ that she wanted him involved in all aspects of raising the children. As a result, Jerry said he was fully involved in ‘disciplining the children’.

Darren (discussed above, see 6.1.2), had been co-resident for three and a half years (now married), from the time he met his partner. He described how he associated co-residence with taking on parenting responsibilities through involvement in discipline and control of his stepdaughter:

Because I was coming into a situation where Annie [wife] had been solely responsible for discipline, then obviously, two weeks into the relationship Annie was one hundred per cent responsible. Three months into the relationship Annie was ninety-five per cent responsible, and it was kinda, “What pace do we take this? When do I start taking some responsibilities?”

Both Jerry and Darren stated that they sought to take on gradually some of the responsibilities they associated with 'involved' parenting. They began to discuss and negotiate their involvement with their partners once they became co-resident. This process of stepfathers' involvement with discipline issues was also a feature of Frank's account of his co-residence, which occurred at the same time as his marriage, and the way he perceived this provided the 'authority' for his involvement.

Frank (discussed above, see 6.1.5), explained the process of his involvement as follows:

I knew when we [Frank and his wife] were courting that I didn't want to get too involved in domestic situations, punishments or being restricted. None of the children have ever been smacked. I had to be wary. There were a couple of occasions when the children really got out of order, and I was tempted to get involved and I had to restrain myself, but it was the wrong time - I was still courting Lisa [wife]. Now that we're married things have changed regarding the operation of authority, discipline, because at the end of the day I've now filled the father figure role. That's changed from being mummy's friend, to being playmate and suddenly becoming this figure who says, "You will go to bed now!" Whereas before I would let Lisa handle it, as I didn't have any authority... I am the father figure [now], and they [stepchildren] accept that more and more. It's been trial and error, I don't push it too much. I still leave a little bit of the discipline, especially in E..'s case [sixteen-year-old stepdaughter] to Lisa.

In addition to the process of involvement, Frank's account indicated that he recognised that the age of a stepchild was also a factor that he had considered regarding his differential involvement with stepchildren of different ages.

6.3.3 Non-resident fathers' perceived lack of involvement

The majority of stepfathers indicated that they sought to take on, or to share with their partners, responsibility for their stepchildren, and this could be

acquired through involvement in discipline and control. Where non-resident fathers remained in contact with their children, stepfathers were more likely to be involved with administering discipline and control than where non-resident fathers had ceased contact.

William and Jimmy provided two examples of stepfathers who regarded their involvement in discipline and control of their stepchildren as based on their perception of their stepchildren's non-resident fathers' lack of involvement. William became involved in discipline and control without prior discussion with his wife. He said that his wife had disagreed with the extent of his involvement. Although he remained involved, he had amended his involvement in accordance with his wife's wishes. Jimmy discussed his involvement with his partner and had her support from the beginning. Both William and Jimmy had administered the 'occasional smack'. Both were biological fathers to children from previous relationships.

William, an army staff sergeant, had been married for one year of a two-year relationship, and had three stepchildren aged three, four and six. He also had two co-resident children aged nine and eleven from his previous marriage, and he had twins aged eight months born into the stepfamily. Referring to his involvement with discipline, William said:

It's a role that I kind of picked up very quickly cause, hem, Chris [non-resident father], did not discipline them [stepchildren] at all. I think it's probably because, even now, because I'd had children, it was a lot easier for me to step back into that role.

I then asked William if his wife was in agreement with his level of involvement. He said:

I think ninety per cent of the time, although sometimes I think she would feel a different course of action would be appropriate. Sometimes I will over react to a situation and she'll say, "Well, maybe it would've been different if you'd tried it like this." And I'll try to take that on board and I'll try, I'll endeavour to modify my behaviour.

Jimmy (referred to above, see Figure 5), believed that as his stepson's non-resident father was not involved in issues of discipline and control, it was therefore left to Jimmy to discipline the child. Jimmy said that his stepson looked to him as being his 'father', and it was therefore up to Jimmy to show his stepson the 'right way' and to keep him on the 'straight and narrow'. Referring to his involvement, Jimmy said:

Nobody else is going to [reference to the non-resident father] and that's it. There's nothing else you can do about it. If I ignored 'im [stepson] and said: "Oh 'e's not my son," what's he going to be? 'E's goin' to end up bein' in nick or... So no, at the end of the day 'e is my son and that's it. 'E's got to do what I tell 'im. If 'e goes an' tells 'is father, then I'll just 'ave to go an' 'ave a row with 'im.

Both William and Jimmy indicated that they had taken on the responsibility for their stepchildren and, in the absence of non-resident fathers prepared to take an active part in discipline and control, the responsibility for discipline and control lay with them. As Jimmy said, he feared that without some discipline in his life, his stepson would end up in prison. Although the non-resident fathers remained in contact with their stepchildren, both William and Jimmy had assumed responsibility for discipline on the grounds that as stepfathers they were the resident 'father', they had experience as fathers, and the non-resident fathers were not sufficiently active.

1 Review of research on stepfamilies, fatherhood and stepfatherhood

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a critical review and examination of relevant theoretical concepts, methods and research findings that relate to stepfamilies, fatherhood and stepfathers, with a focus on stepfathers' involvement in stepfamilies. The first part reviews relevant stepfamily literature. This review is purposefully wide in order appropriately and adequately to contextualise stepfamilies historically and demographically. Although stepfamilies remain prominent and diverse family structures and forms of living, their formation differs from the past. Stepfamilies once formed following the death of a spouse, have been largely replaced by those formed following the divorce of a married couple, the separation of a cohabiting couple, or increasingly where a single mother forms a partnership with an adult male. This raises a number of issues for many men who experience becoming co-resident, partially resident, or non-resident stepfathers, particularly as current legislation encourages the continued contact of non-resident biological fathers with their children.

The review of relevant fatherhood research will focus upon fathers' involvement with children and the concept of biological fathers' care for children. The conceptual shift from a unitary model of fatherhood to one that recognises a plurality of fatherhoods will be reviewed. This has led some researchers to suggest that, theoretically, stepfathers, or others who are not biological fathers but who are providing some of the care that might otherwise be provided by biological fathers, can be involved in care for children in similar ways to biological fathers. It is anticipated that a review of biological fathers'

Stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control was also symbolic of caring for their stepchildren. Jimmy alluded to this when he explained why he believed he had to be involved in disciplining his stepson. Jimmy did not want his stepson to follow the same path that he had taken as an adolescent, and believed his involvement with discipline and control, supported by his partner, was one way to prevent this.

Although parental responsibility is only acquired through a formal, legal procedure, many stepfathers sought to demonstrate responsible parenting. The majority were given responsibility for involvement with the discipline and control of stepchildren, yet their legal position was not mentioned either in terms of their having or not having acquired parental responsibility orders, or their role with admonishing or, in some cases, smacking their partners' children. Stepfathers who were not involved with discipline did not refer to the legal situation as a reason for their non-involvement.

6.3.4 Stepfathers not involved with stepchildren's discipline

Six stepfathers were not involved with discipline and control. Four stepfathers said they had not been prevented by their partners from being involved, but had decided against involvement; one was initially excluded and later permitted to be involved, and he also decided against involvement; and one had been involved and was now excluded (Hassan will be discussed below, see 6.3.5).

Non-involvement was described as either no longer necessary since their stepchildren were 'adult', or as a means of avoiding additional conflict with stepchildren. Bernard, Shahid and Jason said that their adolescent stepchildren did not require any disciplinary intervention from them. Vince said that in the early part of his marriage his wife 'made a point of saying they are not your children'. Disciplining often took place when Vince was not around. He said his

wife was 'very used to being the omniparent anyway'. However Matt, who had the youngest stepchildren of those not involved in discipline and control, explained his non-involvement on the grounds that his previous attempts to be involved had led to increased conflict between him and the stepchildren.

6.3.5 Adolescent stepchildren

Some stepfathers with adolescent stepchildren recognised that their involvement with discipline and control could, and in some cases did, result in a deterioration of their relationship quality with these stepchildren, and to their disengagement from the stepfamily. Where stepfathers had the support of their wives or partners, they were able to continue with their involvement. The majority of stepfathers said that any disengagement experienced was short term, and described this in terms of a 'normal' child response to an adult imposing disciplinary sanctions (see for example, Harold, 8.2.2.1).

Where the support of partners was absent or withdrawn, stepfathers were unable to continue with a disciplinary role. Two stepfathers provided examples of situations where disengagement from stepchildren, of greater magnitude than 'a couple of hours', had occurred. The outcomes for both stepfathers differed, and partners' support was relevant to the outcomes.

Henry, a youth and community worker, married for five years of a ten-year relationship, had three stepchildren aged twelve, sixteen and eighteen, and two children born into the stepfamily, aged six and eight. He described how his involvement with discipline and control had resulted in his two adolescent stepsons distancing themselves from him. Each downturn he described in his relationship quality with his stepsons appeared to be punctuated by a major discipline or control incident with which he had been involved. This resulted in

Henry describing his relationship with the eldest stepson as 'strained most of the time'. However, he said he had the continued support and approval of his wife for his involvement with discipline, and he continued to be involved. Henry described the situation with his eldest stepson as follows:

I don't know how much it is the norm for eighteen year olds to be rebellious and how much is actually I'm not his real dad. I do all the things I think a father should do: he drives the car, I pay for his driving lessons, he has to do odd jobs around the house still... There is definitely a kinda tension between us. We get along, but it's sometimes hard work. An eighteen-year-old person who left college in June, who's not even tried to get a job, and I come home and say, "Well you could've done the washing up, or something." "I've been busy watchin' the telly." Whether that's me being a wicked stepparent or me being a normal father, I'm just a bit concerned that I've done a day's work, I've got to put the washing out or make the tea or whatever. There's seven of us, and it's that kind of issue.

It was exceptional for stepfathers not to be in agreement with their partners' wishes with regard to disciplining stepchildren. In the one case where disagreement occurred, it had resulted in the withdrawal of the partner's support for the stepfather to remain involved with discipline and control. Hassan, a college lecturer, had cohabited for eleven years and had one stepson aged twenty-two and one stepdaughter aged eighteen; he also had two children born into the relationship, aged seven and nine. Hassan said he had been in conflict with his stepchildren and his partner for some time, over a number of behaviour issues which related to his stepchildren. Hassan said that he initially 'took responsibility' for disciplining his stepchildren, and his partner had been in agreement with his role at that time. However, this changed following the birth of his own children. Hassan said, 'My judgement of who should be reprimanded became perhaps subjective. In the beginning Elaine [partner] agreed with my involvement, then later she thought I was biased.' Hassan's partner had

withdrawn her support for his involvement with discipline and control of the stepchildren and, he stated, he was no longer involved.

There are similarities between Henry and Hassan's accounts: both had co-resided for at least ten years, both had adolescent stepchildren, both had children of their own born into their respective relationships, both had been involved in discipline and control of their stepchildren and had experienced conflict with them as a result. However, the important differences are that Henry said he demonstrated equal behaviour towards both his stepchildren and his own children, while Hassan admitted that he did not and was 'biased' towards his own children. Whilst Henry retained the support of his wife for his continued involvement, Hassan's partner had withdrawn her support.

The difficulties for stepfathers of involvement with discipline and control of adolescent stepchildren were expressed by several other stepfathers, who largely had the opinion that it was better, in terms of conflict avoidance, not to be involved. Arnold (discussed above, see 6.1.5), said of his eighteen-year-old stepson that although there was general compliance, there was nothing more that he could do to him in terms of control. Allan (referred to previously, see 6.1.2), said he thought he should be more involved with disciplining his two stepsons in order to support his partner. However, he refrained from having greater involvement on the grounds that it would only result in increased conflict between him and the stepchildren. He said, 'they [stepchildren] can't get it [discipline] from me, 'cause all I'll get is total rejection an' then we're goin' in the wrong direction.'

Discussion and negotiation were major factors that affected the extent of stepfathers' involvement. All the involved stepfathers amended their level of involvement in accordance with continuing negotiations and discussions with

their partners. Modifying their involvement in accordance with their partners' wishes was necessary in order to maintain their partners' support for their continued involvement.

Negotiation of involvement with discipline issues may be regarded as an indicator of stepfathers' sensitivity to their stepfamily relationships. Although most stepfathers sought the responsibilities of disciplining stepchildren that they perceived accompanied their involvement as an adult sharing the care of these stepchildren with their mothers, the majority did not assume this was their right. The four stepfathers who initially made this assumption amended their involvement in accordance with subsequent discussions with their partners. Mothers maintained overall responsibility for their children's discipline and control, and managed stepfathers' involvement with it.

6.4 Chapter summary

While Chapter 5 looked at structural factors influencing stepfathers' level of involvement, namely social class, educational attainment, employment, income, and type of stepfamily formed, this chapter has drawn upon stepfathers' own accounts and described their involvement with six types of activity: family activities, taxiing children, children's health care, children's educational activities, discipline and control, and financial involvement, and how they fitted into family lives.

Although many stepfathers referred to the 'proper thing to do' (Finch and Mason, 1991: 346) in terms of involvement with activities symbolising family life, not all indicated that they were able or prepared to accept the additional commitments or responsibilities attached to involvement in practice. Rhyss and Gary, for example, both referred to their limited involvement with their

stepchildren, both acknowledged that they could do more, and both said they did not beat themselves up over their lack of involvement. Allan explained that he had made a financial commitment in previous relationships and it had not worked out favourably for him. He recognised that he was making a limited commitment to the stepfamily, yet he felt unable to make the same level of commitment he had before. Moreover, as with health care and finances, there were obstacles to greater involvement, in the first case legal issues and mothers' own initiative in taking responsibility, and in the latter stepfathers' financial responsibilities for their own biological children from their previous relationships. Other gendered limitations which they did not necessarily mention include, in the majority of cases, earning higher incomes than partners, which meant that they had more income to distribute and more control over how their income was distributed (see Vogler and Pahl, 1994). On the other hand, their longer hours in employed work limited their availability to be involved. These attributes are associated with a traditional male model of fathering, and were reflected in a number of stepfathers' accounts. Stepfathers frequently used the rationale of their own work commitments for not being present in the home at times when the majority of children's needs required to be met; these continued to be met by children's mothers. Stepfathers, as with biological fathers in other studies (see O'Brien and Jones, 1995), were often unavailable to their stepchildren in the evenings and tended to 'catch up' with them at weekends.

In contrast to their limited involvement with domestic responsibilities, the majority of stepfathers (29/35) were involved with some form of discipline and control of stepchildren. Most had discussed their involvement with their partners prior to becoming involved and all negotiated, or renegotiated their continued involvement with their partners.

As chapter 5 suggested, there were a number of more highly involved stepfathers. This chapter has suggested that involvement was not a straightforward issue, but had often to be negotiated, and there were aspects of stepfathers' lives and experiences that in some cases aided, and in others limited, their involvement. Chapter 7 will examine in more detail resources and constraints on stepfathers' involvement.

7 Stepfathers' experiences: resources and constraints

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will examine some of the resources that stepfathers drew upon and which may have contributed to shaping their understanding and practice of stepfathering. Some resources may have been drawn upon more by some stepfathers than others. Given the diversity of stepfathers' histories and experiences, what were resources for some may have been constraints for others.

The review of the fatherhood and step-fatherhood literature identified that stepfathers were able to draw upon similar resources to those available to biological fathers, such as, experience of being fathered and, in many cases, experience of child care either as a biological father or in other settings, and support from partners. They were also constrained by similar factors, for example long hours out of the home in employment, or children's mothers acting as 'gatekeepers' to their involvement with children (see Chapter 1). However, many stepfathers' parenting of stepchildren will be further constrained by other factors that are not experienced in the same way by biological fathers in first-marriage families, such as continued contact from children's non-resident fathers, maintaining contact with their own non-resident children, or blending their own co-resident children with stepchildren, and ambivalence regarding their involvement in discipline and control of stepchildren (see Chapter 6). Whilst these factors may act as constraints for some stepfathers, they may be turned into resources by others.

In the first section of this chapter I will examine stepfathers' relationships with their own fathers through childhood and adolescence, and seek to establish the extent to which they drew upon these experiences in shaping their stepfathering. I will then proceed to examine alternative sources to which stepfathers have referred, gained information from, been supported or constrained by, which have shaped their stepfathering. I will examine stepfathers' accounts of:

- being biological fathers to their own children prior to becoming stepfathers
- becoming biological fathers within stepfamilies
- contact with their own non-resident children's stepfathers
- their own and stepchildren's contact with stepchildren's non-resident fathers
- support from stepfathers' partners

Experience of talking to other stepfathers outside their families would be an appropriate source to examine. However only two stepfathers acknowledged having had any contact or any discussions with other stepfathers.

7.2 Relationships with their fathers

I asked stepfathers, at the beginning of the interview, to talk about their relationships with their own fathers, both during their childhood and during their adolescence. Questions were phrased in terms of how they recalled their relationships with their fathers as they grew up, what, if any, activities they were jointly involved in, and the extent of physical affection they experienced from their fathers.

The majority of stepfathers provided comprehensive and detailed accounts of their childhood and teenage years and of their relationships during these

periods with their own fathers. Some stepfathers recalled good relationships with their fathers, some talked candidly about 'distant' fathers, others did not recall much about their fathers as they grew up.

The majority of stepfathers (29/35) grew up in two-parent, first-marriage families. Two of these stepfathers were adopted as young children and grew up with their adoptive parents. Both referred to their adoptive parents as their parents. Six stepfathers experienced parental divorce during their childhood. Four were less than nine years old, and two were teenagers at the time of their parents' divorce. Three continued to live with their fathers and three lived with their mothers. Five of the six divorced fathers subsequently remarried.

The majority (22/35) reported that they continued to have good relationships with their fathers throughout their childhood and adolescence; approximately one third (13/35) stated that their relationships with their fathers deteriorated as they grew older. Although the majority of stepfathers (20/35) said they were involved in shared activities with their fathers during their childhood and adolescence, few (6/20) provided any evidence of regular shared activities. Fifteen stepfathers experienced little or no involvement with their fathers in any form of shared activity. The majority of stepfathers (23/35) reported that they experienced no demonstration of physical affection from their fathers.

Subsequent analysis of stepfathers' accounts, led to the following classification of stepfathers' reported relationships with their fathers. I have classified stepfathers' fathers who were reported to have had little or no involvement with stepfathers as children and adolescents as 'distant' (19/35). I have classified stepfathers' fathers reported to have been involved as 'close' (16/35). I have used these terms when referring to stepfathers' fathers in seeking to identify the

involvement in the care of their own children will form a basis for developing an understanding of some stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren.

Finally, the review of relevant stepfatherhood literature will highlight the similarities and differences between fatherhood and stepfatherhood, and factors that have been identified that may resource or constrain stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren. I will seek to focus upon the key themes that emerge from this review in terms of the potential for stepfathers to care for stepchildren and the ways in which this care may be expressed by stepfathers in conjunction with other primary care-givers such as, children's mothers and non-resident fathers.

1.2 Researching stepfamilies

The focus of this review will rely mainly upon stepfamily studies conducted in the USA and the UK, with reference to relevant studies conducted in Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Hong Kong where appropriate. Although there are differences between the US and the UK, for example higher rates of divorce and lone-motherhood in the US, in terms of demographic trends Britain is closer to the US than to Europe (Clarke et al., 1999).

As Burgoyne and Clark (1984) identified, and as was more recently confirmed by Ribbens McCarthy et al. (2003), the context of researching stepfamilies is beset with a number of structural difficulties. The prevailing ideological image of the biological nuclear family has given rise to a tendency for stepfamilies to model themselves on first-marriage families³ (Bray, 1988). Much of our current

³ First-marriage families refers to families that comprise two adults in a heterosexual relationship who co-reside with their own biological children of that relationship. I will adopt this term throughout this thesis.

extent to which these different experiences of fathering impacted on the stepfathers in the study.

The small numbers involved and the nature of the sample made it difficult to assess the extent to which social class shaped their involvement with their sons. Both middle-class and working-class stepfathers reported 'distant' and 'close' relationships with their fathers.

Many stepfathers stated that they had reflected upon their experiences of being fathered and how this had informed their stepfathering. The majority of those whose fathers were 'distant' suggested that they had rejected this model of fathering (11/19) and had been determined to become more involved as stepfathers (see Table 12). A majority of stepfathers who had experienced a 'close' model of fathering (14/16) had also reflected on their experiences. They had selectively carried forward into their stepfathering aspects of their experiences that they identified as satisfactory while choosing not to replicate aspects they identified as less than satisfactory.

Table 12: Stepfathers' experience of being fathered and stepfathers' involvement

		Stepfathers' involvement			Total
		High	Moderate	Low	
Stepfathers' fathers	Close	4	10	2	16
	Distant	4	7	8	19
	Total	8	17	10	35

7.2.1 Stepfathers' experience of 'distant' fathers

More than half of stepfathers (19/35) with fathers classed as distant described them as 'remote', 'Draconian' or 'forbidding'. When their fathers were at home

they were frequently unavailable. They were described as either needing to rest, preoccupied, or involved in self-interest activities. Stepfathers referred to the 'legacy' of poor relationships with their fathers, either in terms of the missed years of knowing their fathers, or in terms of emotional and psychological problems with which they now had to deal through counselling or psychotherapy. Rhyss (referred to in 6.1.1) reflected on his experience with his own father and explained, 'I don't have and wouldn't want to have the kind of position like I saw my father having, of being this distant figure who was wheeled on stage for reprimands and punishment.' Rhyss is now a 'highly' involved stepfather.

The most extreme example was Jimmy's experience. He was put into care for the first six years of his life, as his father would not acknowledge him as his son. Jimmy then lived with both his parents for six years until he was twelve, when his father left home and moved three hundred miles away. Jimmy was then sent to live with relatives until he left school at fifteen, after which time he began to live independently. Jimmy is now a 'moderately' involved stepfather.

More than half of stepfathers with 'distant' fathers (10/19) made allowances for their fathers being 'distant'. They referred to the nature of their fathers' employment, or the fact that they worked long hours or earned low wages. They also referred to a traditional adult male behaviour which they associated with previous generations: the 'breadwinner' earning money to provide for their families. The majority of stepfathers both from working-class and middle-class backgrounds excused their fathers for their inability to spend more time with them on these grounds. There was a 'traditional' work ethic described as the primary role their fathers fulfilled. They believed that it was through this ethic that their fathers demonstrated their support for their families. Any other involvement with their children was secondary to this. Spending time involved in

activities with children was understood to occur when and where time away from work, or residual energy after work, allowed.

Stepfathers referred to their fathers' lack of demonstration of physical affection towards them less as an absence of love for them and more as an inability to express that love in a physical way. Stepfathers indicated that their fathers' commitment to work was how they expressed love for their families. Many claimed that although they did not experience much physical affection from their fathers, they did not doubt that their fathers loved them. As McKee and O'Brien (1982) found, fathers could be regarded both as remote and benevolent towards their children. For example, Gary (referred to in 6.1.2) said his (working-class) father 'wasn't very good at showing affection' because he 'was a victim of the time he lived through' (a reference to World War II). Gary said he never doubted that his father loved him on the basis that he provided for the family. 'He [father] was out producing the revenue so that mother could keep the household going.' Similarly, Jason described his (middle-class) father as, 'a man of his times... rather reserved and not over demonstrative.' He said his father 'saw it as loving, that exercise, being busy, which was for the good of us all [family], more than relaxing and being demonstratively affectionate.' Jason explained that in addition to being busy much of the time, his father probably spent less time with him than with his elder brothers partly because he was not as practical as his father or his brothers.

However, for many stepfathers, their fathers were the only role model they had of the practice of fathering. Gary explained how he had sought a different model of parenting to that which he had experienced with his own father. He had organised a range of activities with his stepson, so that he could develop a relationship with him that had not existed with his own father. Gary and his stepson regularly spent time together and were involved in a range of shared

activities such as, cycling, walking, and watching sports. In addition Gary, talked with his stepson about how they were both learning to have a stepfather-stepson relationship.

Jason described his relationship with his youngest stepchild as 'very demonstrative', and with the two older stepchildren, who were aged ten and twelve when he began to co-reside as, 'reasonably so'. Both Gary and Jason had become 'moderately' involved stepfathers.

7.2.2 Stepfathers' experience of 'close' fathers

Stepfathers who experienced a 'close' model of fathering used the following terms to describe their relationships with their fathers: 'close', 'warm', 'supportive', 'encouraging', 'caring'²⁵. Although these stepfathers agreed that their fathers were out of the home for a lot of the time, they referred to them as 'making time' for them or 'spending time' with them in a variety of activities when they were at home. They talked of being taken swimming, playing football, going on days out, going on family holidays, and being taken abroad on holiday, 'which in the 60s was really unheard of' (Ben).

Chris (referred to above, 6.1.4) said that despite his father having worked long hours as the 'Maitre D' in a West End restaurant and being in poor health, he made a point of spending some time at home each day with Chris and his sister.

He was the kind of guy who would work all day on a shift, but in order to kind of like see us [Chris and his sister] he would travel from the West End back to North London, ehm, to just have an hour at the end of school to just kind of be around us and he would go back to work in the evening and stuff like that.

²⁵ These are similar terms that stepfathers with 'distant' fathers used to describe their relationships with their mothers.

The majority of stepfathers who experienced a 'close' model of fathering identified aspects which they respected or admired, for example their fathers' hard work, ability to provide financially, or ability to be emotionally supportive to their families. However, there were some aspects that they did not wish to emulate, for example working long hours, or being away from the home for a great deal of the time.

Bill, 'low involvement', an IT trainer, had cohabited for two years and had two stepdaughters aged eight and ten. He reported that although his father had provided 'a great sense of stability and a lovely home', he did not wish to experience the 'pressure and stress to provide income for the household' that had resulted in his father being 'at fifty, more or less burnt out.'

Gordon, 'moderately involved', was a trainee police constable, and had been married for two years of a three-and-a-half-year relationship, with three stepdaughters aged eleven, ten and seven and a three-month old son. Although Gordon's father was classified as 'close', he summarised the experiences of many of these stepfathers when he said,

The only experience I have had is my father as a role model and I hope to have improved on that. I think most people say they would like to improve on what their parents have done and I would be conscious to try and do that. It's not a criticism of my father by any means [although] he certainly was never involved with my sister and my development as I am with our [step]children here.

Stepfathers had reflected on their experiences of being fathered and this had helped to shape their stepfathering. Most had selectively carried forward into their stepfathering aspects of these experiences which they regarded as beneficial and had rejected aspects they regarded as being less beneficial.

Being a provider remained important to many stepfathers, although not the sole provider; they also wished to maintain more of a balance between hours spent at work and time spent at home engaged in family-oriented activities. This reflects the changing trends in parental employment over the generations (Brannen et al., 2004). Although many were involved in discipline and control (see Chapter 6), they did not wish to be the main punisher.

7.3 Fatherhood to own children

I asked all ten stepfathers to talk about their experiences of fathering their own children in their previous relationships. All ten had been married previously, eight of these marriages ended in divorce, and two stepfathers were widowed. The majority of these stepfathers' children (7/10) were non-resident (See Table 13). The children of both the widowed stepfathers and one divorced stepfather were co-resident in the step-household. There was a total of seventeen children, mean age 12.06 years (SD 4.8); the youngest was six and the oldest was twenty-five.

Table 13: Stepfathers' involvement and type of stepfamily formed

		Stepfamily Type						Total
		No prev child/ no shared child	No prev child/ shared child	Non-res child/ no shared child	Non-res child/ shared child	Co-res child/ shared child	Co-res child/ no shared child	
Step father involvement	High	4	4	-	-	-	-	8
	Mode rate	9	1	3	1	1	2	17
	Low	4	3	2	1	-	-	10
Total		17	8	5	2	1	2	35

The majority (7/10) described fathering their own children in terms that were similar to those used by stepfathers describing their own 'distant' fathers (see Section 7.2.1).²⁶ They described themselves, when they were co-resident fathers, as having spent many hours out of the home, working long hours, and thereby being good providers for their families, while their wives had practically all the responsibility for raising their children and for day-to-day childcare.

However, many felt that becoming stepfathers had provided them with opportunities to amend their parenting and to become more involved with their stepchildren, and in some cases their own children, than they had been previously. For example, William (referred to in Chapter 6) thought that his approach to parenting had contributed to his divorce from his first wife. He realised this when he had returned from an overseas army posting to discover that his wife had left the family home. He felt that his children (son aged seven and daughter aged five at the time) had grown up without his noticing. '[I]n hindsight, I wasn't the father, in the early years, to them [own children] that I could've been. I had put this sort of stereotype coat on and I was inside it. I didn't realise that at the time...'

William concluded that as a stepfather, he now had an opportunity to parent in a 'different way' than he had done previously. Although he was still in the army, he had obtained a permanent office posting near the army base where he lived. He now worked 'nine-to-five'; his children from his first marriage were co-resident and he was more involved with stepchildren's and his own children's

²⁶ Stepfathers as 'distant' fathers in previous relationships: Colin (1), William (1), AliJ (5), Bernard (15), Louis (8), Allan (11), Ben (3). Stepfathers as 'close' model fathers: Frank (5), Arnold (7), Russ (7). (Age of youngest stepchild at start of stepfamily relationship in brackets.)

activities. He explained, '[We] go to the park, go out on the bikes, maybe at the end of the summer get Emma [wife] a bike... and we'll all go out together.'

All seven stepfathers with non-resident children from previous relationships stated that they spent more time with their stepchildren, through co-residence, than they did with their own children (stepfathers' contact with non-resident children was: weekly 2/7, monthly 3/7, never 2/7). They reported no day-to-day involvement with the parenting of their own children and only occasional involvement with major decisions affecting their children. They felt they had little control over the implementation of any decisions that they had taken either with their former wives or with their own children. They also stated they had no control over how any child support payments were spent. For example, Louis (referred to above, Chapter 6) said that he preferred to buy clothes and shoes for his non-resident daughter, and when he gives money he writes a cheque to her. 'I'd rather do that than give [ex-wife] money for maintenance because they [ex-wife and partner] are stretched for cash and I know where that money would go. It wouldn't go on my daughter.' He felt that his daughter [aged eight] would be able to look back at her bank account when she was older and say, 'Yes, I did get that money from my father.'

Stepfathers reported that when their children and stepchildren met, occasional jealousies were expressed by their own children towards their stepchildren. However, they did not believe they were constrained in their stepfathering by being fathers to non-resident children.

The majority of these stepfathers (5/7) had transferred the focus of their 'parenting' from their own non-resident children to their stepchildren. However, two stepfathers (Allan; Shahid) had maintained close and weekly contact with their children, who remained a priority interest for them. They said that there

were weaknesses in their previous fathering, and they had decided to make extra efforts to be as involved or more involved as non-resident fathers than they had been previously as co-resident fathers. They had low involvement as stepfathers (see Table I in Appendix X) having chosen to prioritise their role as non-resident biological fathers. Shahid, a financial advisor, had been married for thirteen years with an eighteen-year-old stepson and a daughter from this relationship aged eleven and had three daughters from his previous marriage aged sixteen, eleven, and nine. Shahid said he did not feel as close to his daughter born into his current relationship as he did to his three daughters from his first marriage. 'It will never be the same relationship that I have with my other daughters... There is a closeness [with non-resident daughters] that I don't have with my other children [stepson and daughter].' Shahid said he thought the reasons for this were related to resources. He was out of the home at work for many hours to try to meet his financial commitments. He said he felt there was a conflict between his wife's demands on his income and his need to split his income to include his non-resident daughters. He said, 'I am sure Bhavini [wife] feels strongly and would rather I had nothing to do with them [non-resident daughters] and concentrated on her and J.. [subsequent daughter]. That's not possible. I can't deny my responsibilities [to his non-resident children].'

Allan (referred to in Chapter 6) had two children from two previous relationships, and they both resided with their respective mothers. He talked at length about his involvement with his non-resident children's activities, in contrast to his low involvement with stepchild activities (see Table I, Appendix X). He said he had set himself a rule that he would never go for more than five days without seeing his own children. Although he said this was demanding, he too referred to this as his responsibility:

Sports' days, open evenings, my son's mad about football, 'e's very good at it, so that's quite demandin'. Daughter's in the ballet, the usual thing.

So I do find myself spendin' a lot of time runnin' round, but which I don't mind. You know I quite enjoy it. But like I say that's the rule I set down. It's been one of the few disciplines in my life. Partially because I enjoy it. You're the father after all. If you were still together you would do it. I've 'ad people say to me 'ow much they admire me, but I don't think it deserves any admiration. I'm the father an' I make that quite clear. 'Ow much admiration does that deserve, they're my kids. I enjoy it most of the time and the other part you don't enjoy, well that's the responsibility isn't it?

As Smart and Neale noted, divorce and separation from children can awaken in some biological fathers an awareness of the 'taken-for-grantedness of fatherhood during marriage' (Smart and Neale, 1999b: 119). In order to maintain meaningful relationships with their children post-divorce, many fathers had to re-appraise the ways in which they are involved with their children. However, some stepfathers who were fathers to children from previous relationships managed to balance their need to maintain a relationship with their own children with developing relationships with their stepchildren.

Three stepfathers with co-resident children from their first marriages spoke of their continued involvement in activities aimed at integrating their children and stepchildren, which had begun in the early stages of their relationships with their respective partners. Russ, who was moderately involved (see Table II, Appendix X), provided an example when he described himself as 'committed to the family', and referred to taking his three stepchildren and two co-resident children from his first marriage on holiday together. William, with seven children in the household (two of 'his', three of 'hers', and two of 'theirs'), said that he had recently bought more bicycles so that when they go to the park, 'I can be with as many of them as I can.' He added that he intended to put baby seats on to his and his wife's bicycles so they could also take their twins along.

understanding of stepfamilies is based upon comparative research with first-marriage families, which had largely assumed stepfamilies to be homogeneous (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Papernow 1984; Glenn and Kramer, 1985). However, other researchers have indicated that not only are stepfamilies not homogenous (Clingempeel et al., 1984; Smith et al., 2001), they are not directly comparable to first-marriage families (see, for example, Coleman and Ganong, 1990; Bray and Berger, 1993a; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Kurdek, 1994).

In attempting to meet the challenges of researching stepfamilies, various studies conducted during the past thirty years have adopted different methodologies and research designs, and have sampled different populations. A major distinction is drawn between studies conducted by clinicians gathering data from clinical sources, and studies conducted by social scientists gathering data from community based sources. These different approaches have resulted in 'discrepant findings' as clinicians have sought to identify the potential problems of stepfamily formation whilst social scientists have sought a more representative assessment of the consequences of stepfamily living (Ihinger-Tallman, 1988: 39).

Stepfathers have been relatively obscure within stepfamilies, and have proved to be hard to reach by researchers (Hughes, 1991; Fine and Fine, 1992). Masson (1990) suggests that this obscurity of stepfathers has been encouraged at almost all levels of social involvement, outside the privacy of the domestic environment. Until recently, many stepfamily studies gathered data about men in different aspects of stepfamily life from their wives, partners, children or stepchildren (McKee, 1982; Selzer and Brandreth, 1994; Warin et al., 1999; Manning and Smock, 2000). Stepfather research rarely involved stepfathers, and was all too often not based on stepfathers' own accounts. Therefore the perceptions and views of stepfathers are often missing.

In the majority of cases (8/10), stepfathers with their own children from previous relationships used their prior experiences as an aid in their involvement with their stepchildren. They sought to understand how their stepchildren might react to changes in their circumstances, such as their arrival in the family as a stepfather. Louis (referred to in Chapter 6) said that being a father had made him aware that he could not simply walk into a stepfamily situation and ‘assume a role like being a “normal” father’.

7.4 Stepfathers becoming fathers in stepfamilies

Eleven stepfathers were fathers of children born into stepfamilies²⁷. For eight stepfathers this was their first experience of being biological fathers; three had been fathers to their own children in previous relationships. The children were all born after stepfathers were either married to their partners or had become co-resident.

The majority of these stepfathers (9/11) talked about the effects these births had had on the stepfamily household; they used terms such as ‘gel’, ‘grow’, ‘cement’, ‘bond’, and ‘be more coherent’. Some stepfathers also emphasised how the birth of a child signified ‘biological relatedness’ between those household members where such relatedness had not formerly existed. The use of active verbs such as to cement or to bond, and the notion of biological relatedness resonate with one of the categories in Burgoyne and Clarke’s typology, where the birth of a child into stepfamilies symbolised “the ‘normality’ of their family life’ (1984: 194). Only two stepfathers did not regard the birth of a subsequent child as bringing the members of their step-households closer together. Shahid (discussed above, Section 7.3) remained focused on his non-

²⁷ A total of fourteen children had been born to these eleven stepfathers. The children had a mean age of 5.2 years (SD 4.1); the youngest was three months and the oldest was thirteen years.

resident children from a previous relationship. Hassan (referred to in Chapter 6) transferred his parenting focus from his stepchildren to his own children, following their birth.

A feeling of 'permanency' bestowed by the birth of children in the stepfamily is conveyed by Henry's response:

They've cemented the family. They [stepchildren] were all involved in their mum being pregnant and midwives coming round, checking us out, and we [Henry and partner] went through taking books out of the library and showing them what was going on. We didn't shy away from anything. The only bit they weren't involved in was the actual birth and the effect was the family gelling and growing. The two new-borns were really the cement between us all, 'cause they were part of everything.

Although the birth of a child into a stepfamily was regarded by the majority of stepfathers as positive, this also created a tension for many in terms of the ways in which they were able to 'parent' children and stepchildren. All eight stepfathers who became biological fathers for the first time in the step family said they treated their own children differently from the way they treated their stepchildren. Two of the three stepfathers who were previously biological fathers maintained that they treated their subsequent child and their stepchildren equally.

The majority of stepfathers who were first time biological fathers described having different types of relationships with their own children, feeling closer to their own child than to their stepchildren. They described knowing and interacting with their own child from birth in terms of an emotional 'closeness', or a 'bond', based on biology, that did not exist between them and their stepchildren. They described a child's early years as a significant period for the development of this 'bond' and were unanimous in identifying that they had

missed out on this with their stepchildren. They highlighted the fact that they had not been and could never be a complete part of a stepchild's life because they had not always known them. For example, Darren joined the stepfamily when his stepchild was three years old. She had never lived with or met her biological father. Darren explained that he was sure his stepdaughter could not remember much that occurred before she was four years old. However, he said he had 'this bond' with his daughter born into the stepfamily, that he had never had with his stepdaughter, 'and I doubt I ever will, I missed those first three years'.

These stepfathers claimed they could be more involved and, at the same time, more relaxed with their own children than they could be with their stepchildren. They said they did not have to hesitate so much, nor were they compelled to think so much before they acted, and did not have to check so often that they were 'doing the right thing'. Stepfathers referred to the freedom they had to treat their own children the way they chose, to show and receive emotions with and from their own children. They explained their 'reward' for their involvement with their child in terms of having a physical relationship with them, 'real cuddling', that they said they were excluded from in relating to their stepchildren. These stepfathers doubted they could ever experience the same relationships with their stepchildren that they believed they now had, and could have in the future, with their own children. Furthermore, they said they would always have to work harder at being stepfathers than being fathers.

Jerry summarised the sentiments of these stepfathers when he compared being a father to his daughter born into the stepfamily and being a stepfather. Through the birth of his daughter, Jerry felt that he had also become a member of the 'family unit'. He described himself as having become a parent and regarded parents as being more stable than stepparents.

I am now E..’s [his daughter] father, that is it, whatever I do I am still her father. With the other [step]children, being a stepfather means that I am always careful about what I do and don’t do and I examine the role I play quite a lot, in order to try and provide something for them. If I’d been here as their father always, then that’s life that’s what you get. You get your parents whoever, whatever they are. Stepparents come and go... I think if I am going to make a success out of this role [stepfather] then I have to work harder than I would do if I was their father.

Stepfathers were conscious of the differences in the way that they felt towards their own children and towards their stepchildren. Yet, with the exception of Shahid and Hassan, they felt that they acted in such a way that there was no selective treatment of their own child over their stepchildren. They explained they had consciously to ‘seek to balance’ their behaviour so there was no obvious difference perceived by their stepchildren. For example, Gordon said that since the birth of his son,

Intrinsically that must mean more to me than the [step]children that I have no initial input into and I have to be conscious that I am not favouring my son over our girls [stepdaughters]. That is something that I have had to consciously deal with. I try to be as balanced as possible and I don’t think there will be problems with it.²⁸

Darren said he attempted to be fair to both his stepdaughter and his daughter. However, he said he was conscious that his biological relatedness to his daughter may be more compelling for him than his social relatedness to his stepdaughter. He hoped this would not become problematic for the future of his relationship with his stepdaughter or in the ways that he would continue to interact with her. However, in referring to the ‘bond’ he said he had with his daughter, he concluded that ‘you can’t change the way you feel inside. I hope it doesn’t manifest itself in a gross difference in behaviour.’

²⁸ Despite Gordon’s conscious attempt at equity, there was an apparently unconscious difference contained in his terminology between his description of ‘my son’ and ‘our girls’ [stepdaughters].

These stepfathers' accounts suggested that they were aware of what they 'ought' to do for their stepchildren and how they 'ought' to behave towards them. There was a definite sense that these stepfathers felt that they had constantly and consciously to work to 'earn' their place in their stepfamilies and that differed when they became biological fathers; no-one could take that away from them. Although they felt they had now become part of the 'family', the birth of a child highlighted aspects of 'fathering' that they were either excluded from by not being biologically related to stepchildren, or that they had missed through not having been present during stepchildren's earlier years. They interpreted 'behaving differently' towards their own child as an inevitable situation that would arise because there were physical, biological, psychological and emotional 'bonds' that existed between them and their own child that did not exist, or did not exist in the same manner, between them and their stepchildren.

The semblance of 'family' was further consolidated for all ten of these stepfathers, by their use of the terms 'brother' or 'sister' to describe relationships between sibling children, the prefix 'half' was never used within stepfamilies²⁹. Becoming a father was regarded as a permanent relationship with one's own child. In contrast, being a stepfather was regarded as a less than permanent relationship and one that could be terminated by a number of factors, some of which were considered to be beyond stepfathers' control. Whilst they regarded biological fathering as being 'natural', stepfathering was not and had to be 'worked at'.

Although they indicated they had become aware of differences in the ways they could parent their own children and stepchildren, there was no suggestion that

²⁹ The term 'half-sister' was only referred to once when Rhyss said his stepchild's maternal grandmother corrected the child when she had referred to her baby 'sister'. Rhyss said this had confused and upset his stepchild.

they had reduced their involvement with their stepchildren in favour of their own children (with the exception of Hassan). Thus becoming a father in a stepfamily did not appear to constrain their existing relationships with their stepchildren.

7.5 Non-resident children's stepfathers

The majority of stepfathers with non-resident children from previous relationships had to contend with a stepfather entering their own children's lives (7/8). Although the study stepfathers had little actual contact with their non-resident children's stepfathers, four expressed their fears in terms of the threats they perceived these men posed to their children through abusive or violent behaviour. They had reflected upon some of their own involvement with stepchildren and drawn comparisons with similar actions they perceived their non-resident children may experience in the company of their mothers' new partners.

Four stepfathers reported speaking to their non-resident children, their former wives, or their former wives' new partners regarding how they considered a stepfather should behave. These stepfathers said they did not wish former wives' new partners to shout at their children or to be involved in any form of physical punishment of their children. By way of attempting to monitor this, Allan reported that he regularly took his non-resident children swimming so that he could conduct visual checks for any signs of unexplained bruising (none was reported to have been found). Referring to the potential behaviour of 'other' stepfathers, Allan said, 'If there's something I don't like about it, I still have the power to do something about it. On the odd occasion I've 'ad to 'ave words with [ex partners'] boyfriends.'

Two study stepfathers responded to allegations of abuse or violence made by their non-resident children against their stepfathers. This resulted in the children concerned being put on the 'At Risk Register'. William said that his non-resident children may have been abused by their stepfather although no legal evidence was found to substantiate this claim. However, the children were removed from their mother and stepfather by Social Services and came to live with William. In a second case, Louis reported responding to his non-resident daughter's allegation of bruising caused by her stepfather, by contacting the police and social services. His daughter came to live with him for three weeks. However, the investigation resulted in the alleged situation being classed by the police as 'reasonable chastisement'³⁰, and the child was returned into her mother's care.

Allan explained how the fact that his own non-resident children had had stepfathers had helped him come to a better understanding of how he should conduct himself as a stepfather in his own situation. His two former partners, with whom his children continued to live, had both re-partnered. One had married 'a nice chap' that Allan had got to know, talked to and watched with his daughter and said he trusted; his other former partner 'went through some quite rough boyfriends'. He explained,

I didn't really have the problem of, "Oh how am I gonna handle the kids [his stepchildren]" I've had to consider this twice with my other ex's [two former partners] an' their new boyfriends, so I have 'ad to consider these angles and the nightmares of what these new boyfriends are gonna be like. So, I see it from the other side [the biological father's perspective]. Occasionally I've been out of order with the [step]kids, been unreasonable, shouted, or something. I've not necessarily apologised, but I've thought to myself: "If someone did that to my two kids, I'd be extremely upset." I've always 'ad a thing with my two mothers [of his

³⁰ Section 58 of the Children Act (2004) replaced the defence of 'reasonable chastisement' with the new defence for parents of 'reasonable punishment', where 'the physical punishment amounts to common assault against his or her child but not where the physical punishment amounts to assault occasioning actual bodily harm' (Aynsley-Green, 2007: 5).

children], that the [step]fathers, or boyfriends, must never lay a finger on them [children]. One of them's [former partner] re-married now and even there I've made it quite clear [to the stepfather] not to lay a finger on the kids. Now my daughter's quite naughty and she needs a bit of disciplin', but I don't like the idea of another man shoutin' at my kids. So if I tend to shout at her kids [stepchildren], I'm always conscious of whether or not I'd like that done to mine.

Stepfathers with non-resident children, cared for by other stepfathers, were concerned that these men treat their children properly. This encouraged them to remain vigilant and involved with their own non-resident children, to engage and communicate with their own non-resident children's stepfathers or with their non-resident children about their stepfathers. In reflecting on these stepfathers' involvement with their own non-resident children they gave more thought to the ways they interacted with their own stepchildren. Thus having another stepfather in their first family could act as a resource for some stepfathers in their own stepfathering and a means for assessing good and bad stepfathering. Vigilance about their own children's treatment by stepfathers also helped to maintain their involvement with their own children, their former partners and, in some cases, children's stepfathers. However, this did not always turn out well as Louis discovered. He responded to his daughter's allegations (discussed above) and also made promises to his daughter that she would not have to return to live with her stepfather, which he was not able to fulfil. The result was that his daughter distanced herself from him and he was now less involved with her than prior to the events.

7.6 Their partners' child-rearing experience

The majority of stepfathers (25/35) had no prior experience of child rearing before joining their stepfamilies. When asked a series of questions on their involvement with childcare, all stepfathers, including those who had been

fathers, reported their partners' greater involvement in and experience of childcare. Most indicated they were prepared to learn parenting skills from their partners. They said that they followed their partners' guidance or turned to their partners for advice on aspects of childcare, household activities and children's behaviour. For example, when asked who set the household rules, half of stepfathers said their partners and half said they shared in rule setting; none said they set household rules by themselves. Stepfathers who were more highly involved (see Table III; Appendix X) were more likely to be involved in negotiating rule setting with their partners than stepfathers with low involvement who said they 'left it' to their partners on the grounds they 'knew the children', or had 'more experience' with children (see Table 14).

Table 14: Adult responsible for setting household rules and routines

		Adult responsible for setting house rules		
		Stepfather and partner (jointly)	Partner only	Total
Stepfather involvement	High	5	3	8
	Moderate	10	7	17
	Low	2	8	10
	Total	17	18	35

Stepfathers' involvement with household rules and routines was a complex process where some rules existed from previous households and some had to be developed for their current households, as Henry explained:

When you inherit an eight, six and two year old there are an awful lot of boundaries in place. So there were quite strict bedtimes, there were other things that they did and didn't do. So there were some rules that Elizabeth [wife] brought and the relationship that we have is the common-sense view of both of us... It became an agreement based on previous

experience... Other issues that have come up we've had to sit down and take a decision and hope we've got it right. We do an awful lot of talking, loads of it.

Although they never used the term 'gatekeeper', stepfathers who sought to be involved with practical aspects of childcare said that they complied with their partners' wishes with regard to the extent of their involvement and sought to negotiate their involvement, or further involvement, with their partners. (This was evident in stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control; see Chapter 6 for discussion).

Many stepfathers said their partners encouraged them to become involved with aspects of parenting in terms of being given responsibilities for certain activities or being told that it was 'OK' for them to be involved with the children. This was a process of involvement for stepfathers; where over time they became more involved and were provided with more support by their partners for their involvement. Jerry explained the process of negotiation that was similar to many stepfathers' accounts of their partners' support for their greater involvement in household routines, rules and procedures.

[W]hen I first met Janice [wife] and I was getting involved and realised that it was going to be a longer term relationship, we actually discussed how she wanted me to be with the [step]children, because it was important to me to not walk into the relationship and be a dictator. To me, they [Janice and her children] had a family unit of their own and had for several years before I was there... therefore I said to Janice; "How do you want me to be involved? Do you want to continue to be the single adult in the house, but to be having a relationship with me, or do you want me to be involved with the upbringing of the children?" And Janice was adamant that she wanted me to be involved in the upbringing of the children. To be another adult around with her, and she's always supported me in that. Therefore, disciplining the children and the day-to-day stuff, the manners at the table, what they're wearing, whether to put

The first section of this review will focus on the demographic and social changes in stepfamily formation over time, and will highlight the ways in which contemporary relationship formation leads to the potential for an increasing number of children and adults to experience stepfamily living, for at least part of their lives. I will identify a definition for stepfamilies that is appropriate to meet with the diversity of contemporary stepfamily living. This will be followed by a critical review of the major theoretical perspectives within stepfamily research.

1.3 Stepfamilies: a historical perspective

Stepfamilies are not modern phenomena (Ihinger-Tallman, 1988). A number of researchers (see for examples, Batchelor et al., 1994; Gorrel Barnes et al., 1997) have established that as a form of family living, stepfamilies have a long history. Early adult mortality and the death of a spouse were the basis of stepfamily formation from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Widowhood and its associated financial and child-care needs provided the major stimulus for remarriage and the formation of stepfamilies (Stone, 1977). Towards the end of this period, one-fifth of all children were orphaned (Laslett, 1977), less than half of all children reached the age of eighteen with both biological parents still living (Popenoe, 1994), and as many as one-third of all families contained a stepparent (Burchardt, 1990). Many children may have experienced more than one stepparent, and many stepfamilies contained full, half and step siblings (Laslett, 1977; Burchardt, 1990).

The prefix, 'step', has origins in old English 'astepan' or 'steop' meaning deprived or bereaved (Hughes, 1991), 'steopbearn', used to describe a child, indicated the child had been bereaved or orphaned (SOED, 1983).

clothes in the wash, that day-to-day ordinary stuff, I get involved in and the children will respect my word as much as they do Janice's.

Stepfathers' partners were a positive resource in their stepfathering. They acted as 'gatekeepers' to stepfathers' involvement with children, encouraged, monitored and guided their involvement. Many stepfathers agreed they were prepared to learn. They had sought guidance and been given guidance from their partners regarding childcare issues. The majority of stepfathers' partners were described as being willing to transfer some of the parenting of their children to stepfathers and had supported their involvement including; changing nappies, bathing, setting rules, issuing reprimands and disciplining stepchildren. Their partners were also described as providing practical and moral support, positive reinforcement and post hoc discussions to review or amend stepfathers' involvement.

Stepfathers' partners were a constraint on stepfathering only in so far as stepfathers were encouraged to negotiate and renegotiate their involvement with stepchildren through their partners. None of the stepfathers reported that they disagreed with negotiating their involvement with their partners.

7.7 Stepchildren's non-resident fathers

The majority of stepfathers (25/34) reported experiencing some contact between stepchildren and their non-resident fathers. In nine cases, non-resident fathers had not maintained contact and one non-resident father was deceased (n=34). Non-resident fathers' contact ranged from those with shared parenting arrangements where children lived for part of each week with their fathers (3/34), weekly contact (5/34), fortnightly (7/34), monthly (4/34), holidays only (6/34), to never (9/34). Although non-resident fathers' contact was relevant to most stepfathers, few (8/34) had any direct contact with non-resident fathers.

The majority of stepfathers received information regarding non-resident fathers either from their partners or their stepchildren. Where contact between stepfathers and non-resident fathers occurred, this was usually but not always, in the company of the children's mothers.

The reported level of contact of non-resident fathers, in this study, is similar to that identified at a national level of 76% (CSA, 2001). Gorrel Barnes et al. (1998) reported that half of their sample remained in contact with non-resident parents. These different findings, perhaps, reflect the changes in non-resident parenting that others indicate have taken place over time (see Chapter 1). Reasons given by stepfathers for non-resident fathers' lack of contact were either that they or their children had chosen not to have contact (7/9), or non-resident fathers had moved abroad (2/9)³¹. Non-resident fathers who paid child support were more likely to remain in contact with their children than those who did not make child support payments.³² As Seltzer (1994), and Lamb et al. (1999) established, meeting financial commitments in terms of child-support payments enhances non-resident fathers' contact with their children (see Chapter 1),

When asked how they felt about non-resident fathers maintaining contact with their children, most stepfathers (21/34) said they either 'welcomed' or 'acknowledged' their contact, seven said they 'tolerated' and four said they 'detested' non-resident fathers' contact. Although the majority of stepfathers were apparently favourably disposed towards the involvement of non-resident fathers, most were ambivalent towards non-resident fathers' involvement. Many stepfathers said they recognised and valued the importance of contact between non-resident fathers and children, in terms of the child's emotional and psychological development. The majority of stepfathers said they 'encouraged'

³¹ Stepchildren's fathers had a mean non-residency of 8.1 years (SD 4.7; min. 2.0, max. 20.0).

³² $\chi^2=9.7$, $df=1$, $p=0.01$

their stepchildren to maintain contact with their non-resident fathers (18/25), seven said they neither encouraged nor discouraged contact. Two stepfathers typified the responses of many towards non-resident fathers' contact with stepchildren. Henry said, 'they [children] have a right to see him [non-resident father] in the same way he has a right to see them.' Ron commented, 'I know that psychologically he [child] needs to have some bond there [with his non-resident father].' However, Ron said that he would prefer for his 'own emotional needs... not to have to share him [child], because there's the competition. Is he [non-resident father] a better daddy than me? Logically, I know he's not, because he's only there once a fortnight and I'm here all the time...'

Although the non-resident fathers were largely uninvolved in step-households' daily activities, many stepfathers regarded non-resident fathers' continued contact with their children as being a constraint on their own decision-making and activities that occurred within the step-household. For example, they referred to having to consider the wishes of non-resident fathers when planning certain activities, children's celebrations, holidays and often weekend activities. This also extended to decisions about where they lived and about stepchildren's education.

Chris provided an example of the constraint he felt the non-resident father had on his ability to make decisions regarding the step-household. He described the relationship he had with the non-resident father as 'kind of decent, civilised'. They had met on a number of occasions, and not always in the company of Chris's partner. Chris referred to the time when he was planning to move in with his partner and her daughter and they were looking to live in a particular area of London. The non-resident father expressed his displeasure over the area and the schools in the area. Chris said this resulted in letters from solicitors and barristers,

Although we are all talking again, it's like a minefield. In terms of establishing and developing a relationship with a partner, where does the relative power lie? Things that you even might know that you want to do, or think you should do, are actually made quite difficult. I was somewhat surprised then how irritated I was at Phillip's [non-resident father] existence.' Although Chris said that he recognised the benefits of spending time alone with his partner when the stepchild was staying over at her non-resident father's he said, 'it would be so much easier if you wouldn't have any of this kind of interference, just make decisions about how you do the things and you don't really have to be in any way answerable to anyone else but yourselves. And that's when it's going well. God knows what it would be like if it wasn't going well, if there were complications.

Although stepfathers did not feel that they received much in the way of consideration from non-resident fathers, some stepfathers said they went to considerable lengths to facilitate non-resident fathers' continued contact with stepchildren. For example, stepfathers described encouraging non-resident fathers to participate in children's events and special occasions, school events and birthday parties. These stepfathers said that on those occasions they were prepared to take a 'back seat', either through their non-attendance or by maintaining a low profile during the event, in order that they did not cause any conflict for the children sharing these events with their non-resident fathers. Russ said that although he and the non-resident father were initially involved in stepchildren's events, Russ had concluded that this was confusing for the stepchildren. He now ensured that there was no overlap with activities. He said,

It's one of the things about having a real dad and a step-dad in the same room at the same time. I tried that a couple of times going bowling and they [stepchildren] didn't know how to behave. You can't call two people dad at the same time. It was obviously confusing them, and the time they have with their real dad should be just with him and [now] I don't get involved with what goes on.

Russ and many other stepfathers said they demonstrated interest in stepchildren's involvement with their non-resident fathers by asking how they had enjoyed their visit in order, 'to let them know I'm interested but not pressuring them to reveal anything about what goes on.'

Terry said that he went to considerable lengths in order to demonstrate his support for the non-resident father's involvement. Terry said that his focus was not on his own needs, but on what he believed maximised the 'well being' of the child. Terry demonstrated this when he described the non-resident father's contact arrangements. The non-resident father had the child to stay with him on alternate weekends and he visited the step-household one evening each week to play with the child and to put him to bed. Terry said that when the child's non-resident father visited the step-household, he would 'step out of the way'. He said that on the last occasion the non-resident father took the child out for a pizza and Terry went out for a run. Terry said he gave the non-resident father the keys for the house and when Terry returned, the non-resident father was putting the child to bed, after which he left. Terry concluded by saying, 'A lot of people comment that it is a strange relationship [with the non-resident father] but it's a long term view about J..s [child] future. So it is important to make it work. The only person who would otherwise suffer is J..'

These examples suggest that stepfathers were able to use stepchildren's contact with their non-resident fathers advantageously in their stepfathering. Fostering non-conflicted situations between stepfathers and non-resident fathers, and encouraging non-resident fathers to share the parenting of the children concerned, contributed to their own 'good stepfathering'.

However, several stepfathers expressed ambivalence about non-resident fathers' continuing contact with children, and their perceived 'control' over

stepfathers' activities, wishes or intentions. For example, Gary explained how the children's non-resident father had been supportive of his role as stepfather yet had also constrained it. Gary and his partner had discussed with the non-resident father their approach to children's behaviour in both households and all had agreed on presenting a 'solid front'. The non-resident father had indicated his support for Gary's role in children's discipline when he told the children that they had to do what Gary told them. However, Gary was only able to cohabit on a part-time basis, as a caveat that the non-resident father had inserted in the divorce settlement stipulated that he (non-resident father) would be responsible for the mortgage on the former matrimonial home, only until his ex-wife began to co-reside with another partner. Gary had discussed this with the non-resident father who had agreed that Gary could move in and they would split the mortgage fifty-fifty. Gary said that although it was not a monetary issue as he could afford to pay the mortgage, he did not wish to become co-resident on terms and conditions set by the non-resident father. Gary remained partially co-resident.

It appeared that Gary had turned what initially was presented as a constraint on his stepfathering to his financial advantage: Gary made only a limited financial contribution to the step-household. He explained this as follows:

Esther [partner] is entirely responsible for the bills. If anything comes up that's major it is likely that [non-resident father] would contribute towards it, because he's very good that way, he takes his responsibilities very seriously. Up to this point I haven't really been involved, but I'm very conscious because of my presence it mustn't cost Esther money, so, bottles of wine, dinners out, weekends away, that's my responsibility as far as I'm concerned, because if I cost Esther money in any way, then I may as well just take it off the children.

When asked about the future for his relationship, Gary responded that although he was 'obviously looking to solidify things' with his partner 'but not in the immediate, well certainly not in the next twelve months.'

Bill said that he found it difficult to develop a role for himself 'as a stepfather in the stepchildren's lives' because of the close and continuous involvement of the stepchildren's non-resident father. Bill explained that the stepchildren shared their non-resident father's home for half of each week and that, in the past, it had often been difficult to know which adult was responsible for collecting or meeting the children at different times in the week. The non-resident father now prepared a spreadsheet of childcare activities and identified the adult responsible for each; this was sent by fax, weekly, to the step-household. Bill said he found it difficult to take on the role of stepfather when the non-resident father was so closely involved in family matters. However, he had turned what appeared to be a constraint to his advantage; he did not feel compelled to take on as much responsibility for 'parenting' as he might otherwise have done if the non-resident father had not been so closely involved.

These accounts suggest that stepfathers regarded non-resident fathers as a constraint and as a potential resource. Their encouragement of maintained or increased non-resident fathers' contact was turned to stepfathers' own advantage in a number of ways. They were sharing child-care, reducing their financial contribution, providing some space for stepfathers to engage in their own activities, or to be regarded by others for example, partners or stepchildren, as a 'good' stepfather by demonstrating an understanding of the complex parenting situation that exists. Other stepfathers were able to draw on non-resident fathers' contact as a way of reducing the level of parenting responsibility that might otherwise have been expected of them in their stepfathering role.

7.8 Visions of the future

Towards the end of the interview, I asked all participants to reflect on what they thought the future held for them both in the short-term and in the long-term. The responses were varied and ranged from a review of each stepchild's, or child's potential trajectory through education and early adulthood, to a wish for stepchildren to depart so that stepfathers could begin to enjoy a life with their partners. In a small number of cases, stepfathers did not consider they had much of a future to look forward to as part of their stepfamily and were considering leaving in the future; I have classified these as being 'exit-focused' (see Table 15). Those who talked about their future in stepfamily terms, I have classified as 'family-focused'. Those who were more concerned to see their stepchildren leave home so they could spend more time as a 'couple', I have termed 'couple-focused'.

Table 15: Stepfathers' involvement and future focus

		Stepfathers' future focus			Total
		Family	Couple	Exit	
Stepfather involvement	High	8	-	-	8
	Moderate	10	7	-	17
	Low	1	4	5	10
Total		19	11	5	35

Stepfathers who were 'exit-focused' all had 'low' involvement with stepchildren. Although four were in cohabiting relationships, this only represented one-quarter of cohabiting stepfathers. In Hassan's case his relationship with his partner had

deteriorated. He was in conflict with his partner regarding his involvement with the discipline and control of stepchildren (referred to above, Chapter 6), and he felt that his own children born into the relationship were being disadvantaged, as he felt his income was not being fairly distributed. When I asked Hassan about his future he said, 'It is my children I am thinking about, not the relationship. I think the relationship is there to keep the children going, but the meaning of what it was is not there. The objective of what the relationship was is not there.' (I learned shortly after the interview had taken place that Hassan had left the family home and gone to live abroad).

Shahid (referred to above, Section 7.4) had described the conflict with his wife with regard to the way his income was distributed between the stepfamily and his own children from his previous relationship. He said, 'I don't think about it [the future]. I just take it one day at a time.'

Stepfathers classified as 'couple-focused' responded to the question about their future in terms of 'being with [partner] until we retire' (Darren), 'Terry and June' (Bernard). After ten years cohabiting, Fred said, 'We're not married as yet, but we should do.' 'Have time and money to do some of the things we want to do' (Gilbert). There was an absence from these responses of any reference to stepchildren or children; these stepfathers' visions of the future were shaped by their relationship with their partners.

Stepfathers classified as 'family-focused' gave responses to the question about their future that always included some reference to children or stepchildren, and their hopes, wishes, and fears for them in their future. Several also indicated that as they were now a 'family', they would always be there for the children of the family should they require support in the future. Frank's reflective comment summarises the situation expressed by many of these stepfathers.

My relationship with Lisa [wife] is very strong and always will be, we are committed to each other and are very happy with that, but for the children, they are not a separate entity, they are part of our relationship. It makes me happy that they come to me for help and advice and I always leave myself open even when they have little dips, like N.. [non-resident daughter]. I will give her time now to calm down and she knows that no matter what, and I stress that, that I love her and that I am always available for her. And it will be the same for E., O.. and J..[stepchildren].

These stepfathers' accounts of their visions of the future suggest that they were shaped by some of the factors that have been examined in this chapter that resourced and/or constrained their stepfathering.

7.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the key resources and constraints that are available in or impinge on stepfathering. Stepfathers were asked to reflect on their experiences of their own fathers; several had done so previously. The majority of those who had 'distant' fathers had rejected this approach in their own fathering and stepfathering. A majority of those who experienced a 'close' model of fathering had selectively carried forward their positive experiences and rejected their negative experiences of their own fathers, and had become involved stepfathers and fathers.

All stepfathers with children of their own from previous relationships were asked to reflect on their experience of having already been fathers and the ways this affected becoming a stepfather. Stepfathers with co-resident children from previous relationships all said they were more involved with their own children than they had been in their first marriage families; they had become 'moderately' involved with their stepchildren. They were more communicative

1.4 Demographic changes in marriage, divorce and remarriage

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, life expectancy increased. Fewer than twenty percent of marriages ended through death or divorce, and there was a corresponding reduction in the number of stepfamilies (Gorrel Barnes et al., 1997). Throughout this period, divorce was only available to those who could afford it, or on proof of a broken marriage contract as a result of adultery, desertion or unreasonable behaviour. The Divorce Reform Act (1969), which came into force in 1971, introduced for the first time the concept of 'irretrievable breakdown' of a relationship as a means of obtaining a divorce. Irretrievable breakdown created the opportunity to exit from a marriage in a blame-free manner, and has been identified as one of the features that significantly aided the doubling of the rate of divorce (Eekelaar and Maclean, 1994).

High divorce rates have become a normative feature of contemporary family life in the US (Amato, 1999) and in the UK (Allan and Crow, 2001). Divorces granted in the UK have continued to rise from 27,200 in 1961 to 167,100 in 2004 (see Figure 1), of which the majority, sixty-nine percent, were granted to couples in their first marriage (ONS, 2006b). One in three first marriages in the UK are likely to end in divorce (Haskey, 1996) and over half of first-marriages in the U.S. (Bumpass et al., 1995). Hetherington and Jodl (1994) estimated that a further ten percent of married couples will separate but will not legally divorce. Haskey (1999) predicts that four in ten of UK married couples will ultimately divorce.

The rate of divorce for second marriages is higher than for first marriages, estimated at more than seventy percent (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Marriages in which the wife is remarrying are twice as likely to end in divorce compared to those in which the husband is remarrying (Tzeng and Mare,

with their partners and stepchildren and sought to involve stepchildren and children in joint ventures, activities, and plans for the future. The majority of those with non-resident children (5/7) were more involved with their stepchildren (four were 'moderately' involved and three had 'low' involvement with stepchildren) than with their own children.

All had reflected on their previous parenting and most sought to be more involved with their stepchildren than they had been previously with their own children. For these stepfathers, their children from previous relationships did not act as a constraint on their stepfathering. Only two stepfathers retained a primary focus on their children from previous relationships. They had also reflected on their previous parenting and were now more involved with their own children than prior to becoming stepfathers and this did constrain their involvement with their stepchildren. The third stepfather with non-resident children and 'low' involvement, had little contact with the children from his previous relationship.

Stepfathers who experienced the birth of a child into their stepfamilies and for whom this was their first experience of biological fatherhood considered the child as 'cementing the family bonds' since the family members within the household were now related to one another through the child; the majority had 'high' or 'moderate' involvement with stepchildren. They described close, emotional and affectionate relationships with their own child, which they believed would not be possible with their stepchildren. However, they acknowledged this and made conscious efforts to avoid obvious differences in their outward parenting behaviour to the stepchildren. Although they hoped they would be fair to both their own children and their stepchildren, they would not feel as close. Furthermore, they felt differences would arise between their own

children who were permanently resident in the step-household and stepchildren who shared their residence between two households.

Where stepfathers sought to share some of the parenting of stepchildren with their partners, stepfathers negotiated the activities they would be involved in, and the extent of their involvement in these activities, with their partners. The majority of partners were reported to support stepfathers in their involvement. Where stepfathers' involvement did not meet with their partners' approval, further discussion resulted in stepfathers' amending their involvement which, with the exception of one, they saw positively.

The majority of stepfathers reported that their stepchildren remained in contact with their non-resident fathers. The majority of stepfathers believed where non-resident fathers remained active with their children, this was beneficial for the children. However, all regarded non-resident fathers' continued contact as a constraint on their stepfathering as they felt they continually had to give consideration to an adult who was not part of the household. Although few stepfathers had direct contact with non-resident fathers, they were regarded as a constant presence. However, some stepfathers turned the fact of non-resident fathers' existence to their own advantage by stressing to stepchildren the importance of keeping in touch with their fathers, by encouraging contact to be maintained, and by demonstrating an interest in children's shared activities with their fathers.

In the following chapter I will examine the different discourses of stepfathering expressed and practised by stepfathers.

8 Stepfathering: representations and identities

8.1 Introduction

From the analysis of stepfathers' accounts of their involvement in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I have identified patterns of similarity in their stepfathering practices. The elements of these patterns were conveyed in various ways throughout the interviews, on occasions spontaneously, and at other times in response to the questions I asked. Stepfathers' different past experiences and the different family constellations in which they now live produced different ways of talking about their current positions.

The aim of this chapter is to explore stepfathers' representations of themselves. Whilst this study has drawn upon all the participants' accounts for the purpose of classification and analysis, it is appropriate at this stage to demonstrate how particular stepfathers represent different types of stepfathering.

I propose to group stepfathers according to three types of representation, and will describe each group in relation to several dimensions of parenting, such as taking responsibility, making commitments, being sensitive to others, financial involvement, discipline and control of stepchildren, and planning for the future of the family. This presentation will be accompanied by a detailed analysis of three cases, one from each of the identified groups. The three stepfathers have been selected to demonstrate the variety of stepfathering practices and self-representations within the study.

8.2 Representations of stepfathering

The literature review highlighted the many and various challenges that stepfathers faced when they formed stepfamilies, such as living with and caring for a child that is biologically related to another man who may or may not remain in contact with the child. For stepfathers in this study, this meant negotiating their involvement with their partners and also, for some, with stepchildren's non-resident fathers. Although stepfathers were unanimous in stating that they would have preferred never to have any involvement or contact with non-resident fathers, some identified ways of managing, dealing or coping with what they regarded as an intrusion into their lives, and some turned non-resident fathers' contact to their advantage. Some stepfathers had children of their own for whom they also had responsibilities. Stepfathers managed or sought to manage these complex and sometimes competing situations in different ways.

Although all the participants understood the meaning of the term 'stepfather', many (18/35) did not recognise this term as being an appropriate title for the role they occupied within their own stepfamilies. Some said they did not think they were stepfathers, and described their role to be more like a boyfriend to their partner. Allan, for example, said he 'always came at it from the boyfriend angle' whenever he was involved in stepfamily issues. Some sought to deny that they were stepfathers in all but the most technical of senses, and regarded themselves, as Shahid did, as 'a father to all my children'- stepchildren, biological co-resident and non-resident children. Others were adamant that they were 'stepfathers', and that there were clearly defined roles in their stepfamilies for them, their stepchildren, and for non-resident fathers. As Matt stated, 'I am quite clearly a stepfather. They [stepchildren] 'ave a father.' A third group of participants identified less with being stepfathers or fathers and more with being one of two or more adults, with responsibilities for caring for children. Terry stated that

I think it's very important, as does Nicky [wife] and Stuart [non-resident father], that as adults we have our acts sorted out. Stuart comes round here once a week of an evening about seven and he will play with J..[child] here in the house and then he will put him to bed. People think that's a bit strange, Nicky, I and her ex-partner sitting around in our house, but we think it's important to put J.. first. I speak to Stuart quite a lot; I mean we liaise. We feel that's one of the reasons that J..'s quite happy, is because there is never any antagonism.

These different accounts indicated that it was possible to explore stepfathering in relation to these representations. I was able to assign each stepfather to one of three broad categories. These categories, while based initially upon self-representation, have been supported by evidence from the available data on stepfathering practices; including the classification of stepfathers' involvement (as discussed in Chapter 5; see Table IV, Appendix XI). They are based on an examination of the extent to which each stepfather expressed or demonstrated the following dimensions of parenting: commitment to stepchildren and stepfamilies; responsibilities for stepchildren; the ways they expressed sensitivity to the needs of others; their financial involvement; their involvement with discipline and control; their perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their partners; and their visions for the future (see Table V, Appendix XIII). However, because of the diversity of stepfathers in this small sample, these categories are only tendencies and few stepfathers fit neatly into each category. Below I consider each category in turn, and have illustrated each with a particular case.

8.2.1 'Mum's boyfriends' (n=9)

By definition, this group had a low self-recognition of being a stepfather, and many used the term 'boyfriend' when they talked about their situation in the stepfamily. Importantly, they had lived in their stepfamilies for the shortest

period ranging from one to three years (mean 1.8 years, SD 0.8). Five stepfathers assigned to this category were rated as having 'low' involvement and four were rated as having 'moderate' involvement (see Chapter 5), with involvement scores ranging from one to eight (mean 5.6, SD 2.3).

The majority were not previously married (6/9), and all remained unmarried in their current relationships. They were unlikely to have had children from previous relationships (7/9). Two had non-resident children of their own from previous relationships; one focused on these children rather than the stepchildren, and one focused more on the stepchildren. None of these participants had children born since forming stepfamilies.

The majority (7/9) were involved in discipline and control. Two were not involved; one said involvement would lead to conflict with stepchildren, and one said that adolescent stepchildren did not require discipline from him. In the majority of cases the eldest stepchild was pre-adolescent (5/9); three were female and two were male.

Giving consideration to stepchildren's needs prior to becoming co-resident was not reported as a priority in the majority of cases; four stepfathers said they had considered stepchildren's needs, while five had not given it much thought. Where non-resident fathers remained in contact with the stepchildren, stepfathers supported this (6/7; see Chapter 7). Although they mostly acknowledged that contact with non-resident fathers had benefits for stepchildren, this was more about meeting their individual needs, in terms of reducing their level of responsibility, and providing them with some time alone with their partners.

The majority of these men had moved into their partners' homes (7/9); only two were home owners, while none had entered into a joint home ownership or tenancy agreement with their partner; four retained properties elsewhere that they rented out. Some, however, may take on more of the housing costs later. Interestingly, these participants had the lowest median³³ annual income: £22,000. Perhaps, as Ermisch and colleagues (2006) suggest, a lower economic incentive on their partners' part to get married to them. They worked from thirty-five to sixty hours per week (mean 44, SD 9.0). This group contained the only unemployed stepfather. Their partners (7/9) had the longest weekly hours of all stepfathers' partners in paid employment (mean 35.6, SD 15.8, range 14-55), and they had the highest median annual income: £18,000. Two were not in work and claimed benefits, two worked part-time because of child-care requirements, and five were employed full-time. Three had higher incomes than their stepfather partners, suggesting that they were the main breadwinners.

Participant's scores for satisfaction with their relationships were the lowest of the three categories ranging from thirty to forty-four (mean 36.2, SD 4.6). This suggests that there was some ambivalence regarding their vision of the future of their relationships with their partners, and a lack of willingness to make commitments. In terms of visions for the future, three were classified as 'family-focused' and had planned for a future with their stepfamily, three were 'couple-focused' and had planned for a time when the stepchildren were no longer dependent, and three were 'exit-focused'; they did not see a future as part of their stepfamily (see Chapter 7).

³³ Because of the wide range of respondents' partners' annual incomes (£2,000 - £50,000), the median has been used for the purpose of comparison.

8.2.1.1 The case of Bill

Bill's narrative expresses the ways many of the stepfathers in this category were trying to manage the challenges of becoming a stepfather, the outcomes of which were more likely to maintain or reinforce their distance from becoming more involved with stepchildren than to encourage greater involvement.

Bill was thirty-seven years old and worked full-time as an IT trainer in a university near where he lived. He had enjoyed his childhood and had a good relationship with his father, whom he described as a 'good provider' for the family, in the traditional sense of working long hours and being the main breadwinner. Bill was married for fourteen years until his wife left him for a much younger man. During his marriage, which had been his only serious relationship until he met his current partner two years ago, Bill said that he had never wanted children. Bill's new partner Rebecca, and her two daughters aged eight and ten, moved into the cottage that Bill bought following his divorce. Rebecca worked part-time, and Bill stressed that he encouraged her to continue to work. Rebecca and the children used the non-resident father's surname. Rebecca's divorce proceedings had not completed and there was no indication of any hostility between Rebecca and the children's non-resident father.

Bill said that he prepared himself for co-residence by considering what this would mean for him. 'I thought I could cope with it', he stated, 'All the complexities you read about or can imagine, they've not come as a surprise, there haven't been any shocks.' There was a shock later, however, when, without thinking, he smacked the elder stepdaughter for getting out of the car on the traffic side of the road. He said his first concern was to inform the non-resident father and subsequently his partner. There were no repercussions as a result of this incident. Bill had not been involved in disciplinary issues prior to this incident nor has he been since.

Bill described his relationship with Rebecca as 'having a need for her, and she for him' and stated that he gets on 'extremely well' with the stepchildren, and that they get on well with him. The elder child 'is on the same wavelength', and they communicate well. The younger child is more distant; he believes this is because she does not want to be disloyal to her non-resident father, although he thinks the distance is becoming less as time passes. The elder child 'will want to sit with me, cuddle and watch TV. She's quite happy with that.' The younger child, 'I think actually wants to do that, [but] she will sit quietly, with me in a near space, that's as much as she wants to do.'

Bill referred to the children as 'my partner's children', although he said that he occasionally called them 'my children' when talking to people that were 'detached from the family, for simplification mainly, but it is also something that you quite like to say sometimes - it's kind of a nice feeling as well.' He said the stepchildren referred to him by his first name or by his initials.

A co-parenting agreement exists whereby the stepchildren live alternate weeks at the home of their non-resident father. This had been informally agreed between the non-resident father and the children's mother 'but [was] formal in the sense that it is worked out on a rota [prepared by the non-resident father], and we [Bill and Rebecca] get a printed sheet showing who has responsibility for what on what days...' Bill said the arrangement worked well for all concerned, although he was uncertain about the consequences in the long term. For Bill, the benefits of the co-parenting arrangement provided time to be alone with his partner; at the same time, the children spent a lot of time with their father. The disadvantages were that the children saw less of their mother, and 'everybody finds it difficult to readjust each week.' Bill said he did not feel excluded from family planning, although the majority of planning occurred between the children, their mother and non-resident father. He also said that because of the

planning and shared residence, he only felt like a stepparent for one week at a time, and then 'it gets broken'. The non-resident father's involvement 'is such at the moment that it would be difficult for the same kind of response that maybe a stepfather has in children's lives and children in stepfathers' lives'. Although Bill said he would prefer a more continuous situation, he was 'quite content for it to be like it is. In a lot of ways I am happy with a relationship that isn't giving me that level of responsibility.'

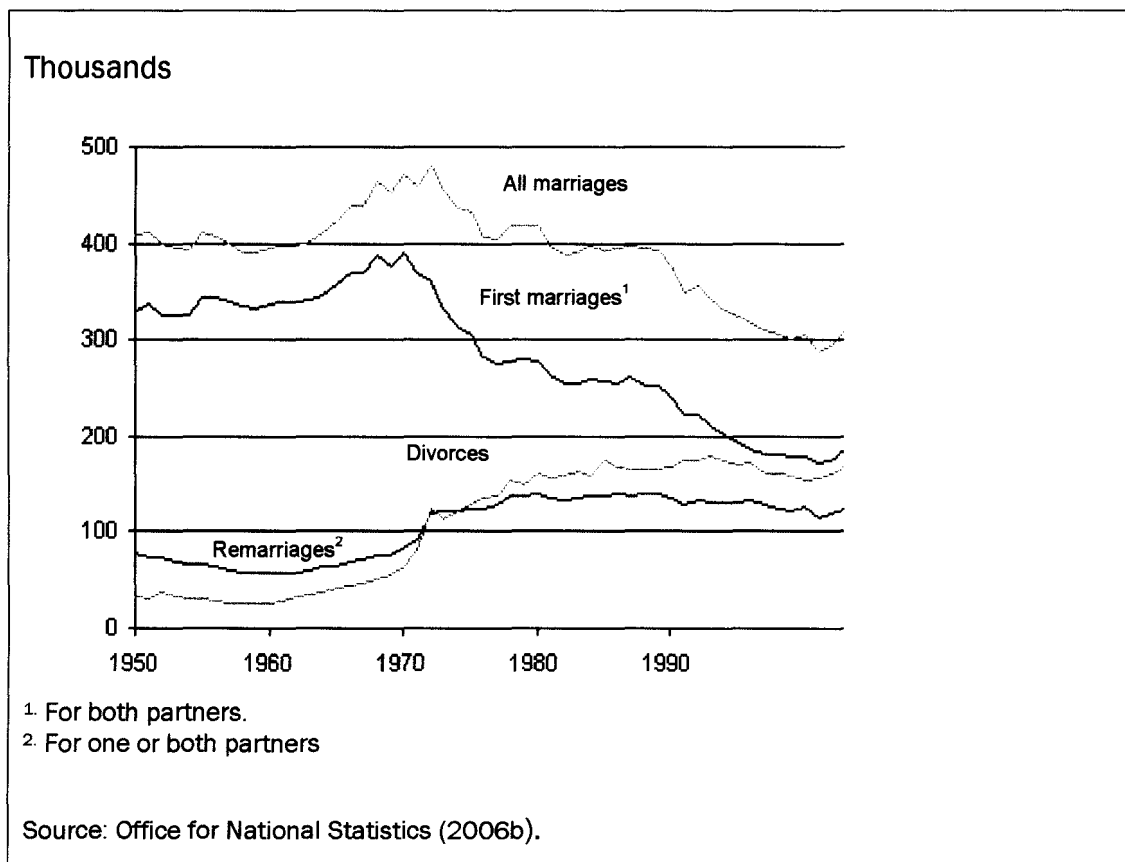
Uncharacteristically for participants in this group, Bill was the house owner. He was responsible for paying the mortgage, household bills and repairs, while Rebecca paid for the food and children's clothes. He had maintained his financial affairs separately from the household, and felt reluctant about 'letting go of this control, about getting more and more involved financially.'

Bill said that sometimes, when he came home from work, he felt 'trepidation': 'There have been occasions when I've thought, I was living on my own here before and I've come back and the house is full. Children. All the lights on and I'm thinking; Oh, I don't know if I wanna go in tonight. So... I take a sharp intake of breath and say; OK get on with this.' He talked of insecurities that he perceived the stepchildren felt about their circumstances, and of his own insecurities. 'I am mum's boyfriend and maybe this [relationship] could topple... They [stepchildren] would be keen if mummy and daddy got back together, but I think it would be terribly upsetting [for the children] if I split up with Deborah and she moved on to another boyfriend.'

The stepchildren did not confide in Bill: 'they will take things to their mother or wait 'til the evening and telephone [non-resident father] when he gets in from work.' Rebecca was not yet divorced; this may be completed in about a year. Bill said he had considered marriage, 'But who knows what happens in a year's

1995). Although there has been a downward trend in first marriages since the 1970s, accompanied by an increase in divorce, marriage continues to retain its popularity, with the majority of couples, around seven in ten, being married (Social Trends, 2006b). Approximately ninety-five percent of women and ninety-one percent of men in the UK have married at least once by the age of forty-nine (NFPI, 2000). However, the proportion of those who are currently married has declined to fifty-four percent for men and fifty-two percent for women (Social Trends, 2003). The average length of marriage in the UK is nine years (ONS, 2002).

Figure 1: Marriages and Divorces (UK)



time? I'm still an individual that could go, it's something that persists, it does, although I've got no intention of running away. Maybe while I continue to think like that it won't be a successful family unit.' Bill summed up the situation by stating that while 'I do love children and I do love having those children around... they are not my stepchildren, yet.'

Bill demonstrated commitment by sharing his former home with Rebecca and her children. He demonstrated financial responsibility by paying for the mortgage, household bills and repairs; Rebecca paid for the food. Although Bill's income was almost three times his partner's, he expressed reluctance and uncertainty about sharing his financial information and resources with his partner and her children. On balance, Bill's financial expenditure has changed little since living on his own prior to Rebecca and her children becoming co-resident.

In terms of daily routines and responsibilities, Bill had made few changes to his life since Rebecca and her children moved in. His daily practices had altered little, and he expressed some apprehension that they may be altered. Although he described the stepchildren warmly, he had little involvement in stepchild activities (rated as 5/18 for involvement; see Chapter 5). He referred to his apprehension on occasions, coming home from work and discovering the house full and 'all the lights on'. He had also mentioned that the children would be unhappy if he, and not their mother, met them after school. He was sensitive to avoid this whenever possible.

Bill felt that he was not required in an active parenting role, as the stepchildren had their mother and a highly active non-resident father, who 'remotely' coordinated the children's activities and those of the adult who would take responsibility for a given activity on a given day. Although Bill had little personal

contact with the non-resident father, he expressed respect for the non-resident father's parenting qualities. He felt that the existing co-parenting agreement and level of non-resident father's involvement negated any necessity for him to take on further responsibilities, and he was content for this to continue.

This was further highlighted when Bill had smacked one of the stepchildren. His first concern was how the non-resident father would react, and what his response would be. Although he said he was pleased this incident did not 'blow-up into a big issue', he made a point of not having any further involvement in disciplinary matters. In some respects, Bill demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of his stepchildren and their non-resident father through his compliance with the prevailing circumstances. He also recognised the different needs of each of the stepchildren in the ways that he interacted with them. However, it was the potential impact that being, or in his words becoming, a stepfather would have on his own future that remained an important concern. Bill was as uncertain about the future prospects of his partner and stepchildren continuing to live with him as he was about his future with them.

Bill, in representing 'Mum's boyfriends', has sought not to become involved beyond the minimum required to maintain his relationship with his partner. He has paid the bills that he would otherwise pay if he was living alone, and made some contribution to joint household bills. He has preferred not to take on responsibilities for the stepchildren, and is content that the non-resident father is actively involved, and meeting his financial responsibilities in terms of child support payments.

8.2.2 'Traditionalists' (n=17)

Seventeen participants referred to themselves either as 'dads' or as 'stepdads'. They had been co-resident between one and thirteen years (mean 5.5, SD 4.2). These men were rated as being mostly 'moderately' involved (see Chapter 5); their involvement scores ranged from 2-13 (mean 7.4, SD 2.8). In contrast to the latter group, where the majority (6/9) had 'low' involvement, the majority of this group (12/17) had 'moderate' involvement; one had 'high' involvement and four had 'low' involvement. The majority were married (11/17). Whilst biological fathers were in the minority in the latter group, they were in the majority in this group; ten were fathers to children of their own, five from previous relationships and five from within their current relationships. Those who were biological fathers all used the term 'dad' to describe their role. Those who were not biological fathers clearly identified with the term 'stepfather' and referred to themselves as 'stepdads'. Despite the terminology differences, or because of the use of recognised terms, these men were similar in that they identified with clearly defined roles for themselves, in the presence or absence of continued contact from non-resident fathers.

The majority (13/17) were involved in discipline and control of stepchildren. Three were not involved in discipline, and one was prevented from being involved by his partner. The majority of stepfathers in this category (10/17) had adolescent stepchildren, half were female and half were male. Approximately half (9/17) said they had given consideration to the needs of their stepchildren prior to becoming co-resident. Thirteen stepfathers in this group experienced contact from non-resident fathers; ten experienced this contact as a constraint on their stepfathering.

In contrast to the latter group, the majority of the men in this group (11/17) owned or shared the ownership / tenancy of the homes they lived in with their partners. They worked more hours per week than men in the previous group,

ranging from thirty to seventy hours (mean 45.0, SD 3.8), and their median annual income was higher than the latter group: £26,000.

Their partners (14/17) worked the shortest weekly hours of all stepfathers' partners in paid employment (mean 26.1, SD 10.5, 10-45) and had a median annual income of £10,500. Stepfathers' partners had higher earnings in only two cases in this group. Where partners were not in employment, this was a child-care choice made within the family; they did not claim welfare benefits. This suggests that, in contrast to the previous group, these men (and their partners) conformed to a more traditional main breadwinner model, with some partners remaining in the home to provide child-care, while others were secondary earners.

Their scores for satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with their partners ranged from twenty-one to forty-eight (mean 39.8, SD 6.6). This was higher than the latter group, and may be due to greater role clarity, which may have been supported by their more traditional approach to work and childcare. As Allan and Crow suggest, one typical way of reducing tension between spouses is when one is assigned or accepts 'the major responsibility for family and domestic organisation' (Allan and Crow, 2001: 95). In terms of greater commitment than that observed in the previous group, most were married and most paid or shared the major costs of mortgages/rents. Their visions for the future suggest greater commitment to stepfamilies than the previous group. In seven cases men were 'family-focused', in eight cases 'couple-focused', and in only two cases were they 'exit-focused' (see Chapter 7).

8.2.2.1 The case of Harold

Harold's narrative highlights the key features of what being a 'stepdad' means. Harold was thirty-three years old, and a self-employed window cleaner. He

described his childhood as 'good in parts'. His parents divorced when he was three, and he was raised by his father. Although they were frequently active together, most of the shared activities he recalled were his father's interests rather than his. Prior to his current relationship, Harold had been in a non-cohabiting relationship for two and a half years, and had three previous serious relationships. Harold met his current partner, Edna, three years previously and began to co-reside, in her family home, two years ago. The tenancy was in Edna's name and she was responsible for paying the rent. Harold had taken responsibility for all the other expenses with the exception of children's clothes, which he shared with Edna. Although Harold made a larger financial contribution than his partner, he felt he had become an equal partner in the relationship. He did odd jobs around the house and most of the cooking, while Edna did the ironing and the cleaning. They both shared the gardening.

Harold said he gave serious consideration to the fact that his partner had children before he became co-resident. 'I thought it could be good, if you like didn't have too much stress and interference. The ex-husband interfering would be the beginning of the stress...'

He said he got on extremely well with all three stepchildren who lived in the stepfamily household, one boy aged fifteen, and two girls aged ten and thirteen. There was a fourth stepson aged eighteen who lived with his non-resident father and had much less contact with the step-household. Harold described one visit from him where he was well received by his mother and siblings, but they all soon continued with their own activities, while Harold was 'left to sit and talk to him, feeling awkward.' The stepchildren and Edna used the non-resident father's surname.

Harold described the youngest stepchild as being the most loving, while the elder stepdaughter was 'a bit more stroppy'. He claimed that he did not mind this, as 'she can be like that towards her mum, so I know it's not me.' Harold and his stepson 'just mess about all the time'. He said he referred to the stepchildren as 'the children'. 'I don't say they're not mine, unless people ask me. I don't say "the stepkids" unless I'm asked. But it's not a problem. If it's a total stranger I just let them go with their assumption, but if its someone I know then I would tell them that they are not actually mine, in terms of blood.' Harold described himself as a stepfather: 'I'm not their dad, but I'm the man in the house hence, I'm their stepdad. I do some of the things that if their father was here he would do. Sometimes, if the've [stepchildren] done a card it is to mum and dad, other times to mum and Harold. So, father, in inverted commas, but stepfather. I think they [stepchildren] see me as some kind of stepdad.'

The children's non-resident father had little contact with them, and when he did it had been irregular. Harold did not think the non-resident father contributed much to the children's lives; he made no financial contribution. Harold described a typical visit from the non-resident father. 'It seems that he [non-resident father] does it out of duty rather than love. Well I am sure he loves his kids but... he will basically just take them down the pub, get drunk with his mates and buy them [children] cokes for the whole day.' Harold summed up the role he thought the non-resident father should have in the children's lives as 'none now as a result of the way he behaves to them... But if you go back two years I think he should have had an active role and had a say in things and have them a bit more and spend some quality time with them. Maybe have them stop over once in a while. They could bring a bit of homework and maybe sit down and do a bit of homework with them, something like that, but now, no chance.'

Harold described his involvement with the stepchildren. He said he did most of the cooking and planned the week's menu carefully so as to balance the stepchildren's likes and dislikes. 'There is always going to be one that is unhappy... Like they come in from school and say; "What's for dinner?" If its chilli, then one of them is dead and the other is happy and if its something else, then vice-versa. Its not a major issue, but it's there.' Harold also had some involvement with discipline, mostly in reinforcing Edna's decisions. This could lead to resentment from the stepchild concerned, although 'When there is a bit of disciplinary to be done, they [stepchildren] might resent it for a couple of hours, but then that probably goes for parents anyway.'

Thinking about his own role, Harold explained it as follows:

Apart from actually physically being their dad, I feel that I more or less am and ninety percent, if you like. I know you can never be because their dad is always going to be their dad. Especially while they are young, he can't do anything wrong no matter what he does. In terms of what I do, it wouldn't be any different if I was their biological father. It [being a stepfather] is not something I've chosen. It's just like slotted in and I'm quite happy with it. Yeah, it's all right. Sometimes it gives you a bit of satisfaction... I think it's important to find a line between... it'll be easy just to sit and hold hands with Edna and cuddle up in a corner and forget about the kids, yeah. But you can't take the mother away all the time because that creates atmospheres and all sorts. It's about finding a balance. Well, I've never been a father, so it's difficult to say, but I think I get to do most things they do. I may not have been there for the nappy changing, or to see them grow up from being very little, but I am here and they are growing up.

Harold did not plan to have children with Edna, as he said this would lead to tension with existing stepchildren because of the attention a further child would require. He said of the future, 'I think we could be quite happy, left to our own devices [reference to non-resident father] and getting on with everything.'

Harold had taken on responsibility for some of the household's financial costs. Edna remained responsible for paying the rent and, as it was a council tenancy, there were only minor maintenance costs. Although the major earner in the household - (he earned three times the income of his partner) Harold only paid for the food, some leisure activities and a share of the cost of children's clothes; probably little more than he would have spent if he was living alone. However, he was involved with some of the domestic challenges of raising children and did the larger share of menu planning and cooking. This required little in the way of negotiation, however, as Edna did not particularly like cooking whereas Harold enjoyed it. He noted that his regular involvement with this domestic activity provided opportunities to develop relationships with the stepchildren. His involvement with stepchildren's other activities, however, was limited (rated as 10/18 for involvement in Chapter 5). He referred to the stepchildren's own commitments to their friends, school and to others as being of greater importance to them. This may have been a means of justifying his moderate level of involvement outside the activities he chose to become involved with, such as cooking. Harold thought that he had contributed to an improvement in the children's diet and he had helped to create a sense of stability within the step-household. As with Bill above, Harold's long-term commitment was vague. His vision of the future was 'couple-focused' and he looked forward to the time when the stepchildren would leave home, he could spend more time with his partner, and the non-resident father would no longer be a relevant factor in his life.

Although Harold recognised the non-resident father's rights and obligations as a biological father, he regarded him as having forgone his opportunity to be involved as a parent through his disregard for these obligations over the previous two years. Harold did not think the stepchildren had much to gain from

the non-resident father's continued involvement. However, he recognised the value it had for the children, and tolerated this irregular and, in Harold's opinion, unsatisfactory involvement on the grounds of the children's rights and emotional well being.

Harold had also given some consideration to the needs of the various stepchildren prior to moving into their home, and continued to recognise that his involvement with each differed with each child's personality and experience. Harold was also sensitive to the stepchild-mother bond and sought to minimise conflict with the stepchildren. When conflict situations arose, he equated the consequences of his involvement in discipline and control to those that he assumed any parent would experience.

As the major earner, and in the absence of any financial contributions from the non-resident father, Harold had made financial commitments to the stepfamily. He had become moderately involved with stepchildren's activities, although these were more likely to be activities he enjoyed, rather than those the children enjoyed. Much of the time the stepchildren were occupied with their own activities. Harold had taken responsibility for some aspects of parenting that he believed a co-resident father would otherwise be involved with. Regardless of how poorly he assessed the non-resident fathers' parenting, Harold recognised that the non-resident father could do no wrong in the eyes of the children; he would always be a factor to take into consideration as long as the stepchildren were co-resident. Therefore, although Harold was the resident male-figure, he was clear that there were limits to the returns he would gain from his commitment to parenting because of the 'presence' of the non-resident father, which would not cease until the children left home.

8.2.3 'Co-operative Caretakers' (n=9)

These participants appear to have moved beyond regarding themselves either as stepfathers or fathers; they stressed the *multiple roles* they performed along with the child's mother and biological father which were focused towards the care of the child(ren) concerned (see Chapter 7).

They had been co-resident with their partners from between one and ten years (mean 3.5 years, SD 3.3). This is slightly longer than 'Mum's boyfriends' and shorter than 'Traditionalists'. They were rated as 'highly' involved (see Chapter 5), with a mean involvement score of 14.2 (SD 2.7, range 10-18). Only two had scores that indicated they were 'moderately' involved; they were both stepfathers (widowed) with co-resident children from their previous relationships (Russ; Arnold).

Like the 'Traditionalists' and in contrast to 'Mum's boyfriends', the majority were married (7/9). The majority (5/9) also had an additional child born since becoming stepfathers. All were involved in discipline and control of stepchildren, and the majority (8/9) said they gave serious consideration to the needs of their stepchildren prior to joining their stepfamilies. The majority (5/9) had pre-adolescent stepchildren; three were male and two were female.

Where non-resident fathers remained in contact with children (8/9), all participants supported this. Although in some cases this caused stepfathers to feel constrained. In contrast to many 'Traditionalists' and 'Mum's boyfriends', they encouraged non-resident fathers to maintain contact and supported stepchildren's attempts to maintain contact with their non-resident fathers. Ultimately this was advantageous to these stepfathers in terms of 'good' stepfathering.

However, an increase in cohabiting relationships as an alternative to marriage (Bumpass et al., 1995; Hetherington and Henderson, 1997; Kiernan, 1999), and the increased incidence of women bearing children outside of cohabiting relationships (Allan and Crow, 2001; Ermisch, 2001), have resulted in family and marriage statistics becoming less reliable as indicators of family formation and reconstitution (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). Projections suggest that by 2021, twenty-two percent of all couples will cohabit, and more children will be born to never-married cohabiting couples⁴ who will live in more cohabiting unions (Haskey, 2001).

It is estimated that one million children in the US every year experience their parents' divorce (US Bureau of Census, 1992); one in ten children will experience at least two parental divorces before the age of sixteen (Furstenberg, 1988); and one third to almost one half of all children will have some form of stepfamily experience before they are eighteen years old (Bumpass et al., 1995; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000; Gillis, 2000). Many children will experience multiple adults in their lives, mainly men, through parental dating, cohabitation and remarriage (Bray and Berger, 1993b).

Trends in family formation suggest that stepfamilies are becoming increasingly prevalent (Glick, 1989; Norton, 1991; Amato, 1998; Ferri and Smith, 1998; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000; Gillis, 2000). Of the 700,000 stepfamilies in the UK with dependent children, 400,000 were married couple stepfamilies and 300,000 were cohabiting. The majority are stepfather families (88%), 9% are stepmother families and 3% of stepfamilies have children from both partners' previous relationships (ONS, 2006a). Ferri and Smith (1998) identified that,

⁴ 42% of all UK births in 2004 occurred outside marriage (Social Trends, 2006a).

Russ, ably expressed the sensitive approach he adopted towards the involvement of the non-resident father. When asked what role he thought the non-resident father should have, he said,

That's a hard one because there are a whole lot of things pull me in different directions and to be completely honest, my instinct is that their lives [stepchildren] would be less complicated and less stressful if he wasn't there at all. Even although they only see him once a week or once a fortnight, it's kind of raking up the past. They must go around thinking; "Oh, if only mum and dad had stayed together, this is what the family would look like." And they keep going through this particular mill and then they come back and there's me telling them not to swear, and the house is full of the other kids [Russ' own two children]. So in the absolute, I don't actually think it's good for them, but I equally know, who am I to judge? And I could be totally wrong in that impression.

Also I think it distorts their view, because obviously, there's their dad, so when he sees them once a fortnight, he spends a lot of money on them, he gives them presents, they've got 101% of him for the evening and then they come back to how it really is for the other 99% of the time and that confuses them as well. They have all this attention, money and time, lavished on them, and I have to say sometimes, "Hey look, you get that from me, but that is spread out over a week, not just in two or three hours." And I think that is hard for them as well.

Like the 'Traditionalists' and in contrast to 'Mum's boyfriends', the majority (8/9) owned or shared the ownership / tenancy of their homes with their partners. This group consisted of dual-earner households like the 'Traditionalists', but earned the highest (median) annual income: £39,000. They worked between thirty-five and fifty-five hours per week (mean 42.2, SD 6.2), while the majority of their partners (8/9) were in paid weekly employment from twenty to thirty-six hours (mean 27.8, SD 7.4), and earned a median annual income of £11,000. This was higher than the median income for women in the 'Traditionalists', but lower than women in 'Mum's boyfriends'. In one case - Russ, his wife was not

employed. She had previously been on state benefits as a lone parent. As there were now five children in the family, the employment and domestic roles were divided along more traditional lines; she was allocated the domestic responsibilities, and Russ the income earning responsibilities.

Participants' scores for perceived relationship satisfaction with their partners were the highest out of the three groups, ranging from thirty-eight to forty-eight (mean 43, SD 3.8). These men did not differentiate between their relationship with their partners and their relationship with their stepchildren; all had a 'family-focus' (Chapter 7), suggesting that their overall satisfaction was with their stepfamily. These men had a long-term view of the future within their stepfamilies, talked about placing the needs of their stepchildren above their own needs, and looked to the future in terms of a developing family (see Chapter 6).

8.2.3.1 The case of Henry

Henry, aged 43, was married to Elizabeth, also 43, who had two sons aged eighteen and sixteen and a daughter aged 12. Henry and Elizabeth had been married for ten years and had two sons born since then, aged eight and six. He described his childhood experiences with his own father as being 'close', with lots of visits to places of interest and shared activities, although his father was not physically demonstrative.

Elizabeth and her three children moved into Henry's house twelve years ago following a threatening situation with her ex-husband. Henry had met Elizabeth previously at a party and had given her a key for his house should she encounter threats of violence. He described the first night he met Elizabeth's children:

I'd gone to the pub. I got a call saying that she [Elizabeth] needed some place to stay, and when I got home there she was with three little kids I'd

never met before with carrier bags. I opened the door, went in and put the kettle on, and we've never looked back.

There are four surnames used in the household: Henry used his surname, Elizabeth used her maiden name, her children used a double-barrelled surname combining their mother and father's surnames, and their children also used a double-barrelled surname combining Henry and Elizabeth's surnames. The house remains in Henry's name, although he noted that in his will it is clearly stipulated that the house will pass to Elizabeth in the event of his death.

Henry explained that he had given a great deal of consideration to the needs of his stepchildren. He felt that he was having a relationship with the mother of three children and he had no right to force that on the children. He said he had to respect their wishes and their needs. He said that the more he discussed the long-term arrangements with Elizabeth and her children, the more he realised how complex it could all become, and they consulted a solicitor to make secure arrangements for shared finances, insurances, wills, and children's residence. Henry pays for the mortgage, and the rest of the household expenses are shared. He described a recent example of receiving a sum of money:

So it has come to me from my father, but I'm not me, I'm us. I have a very clear definition of who me is. Like 'Bread' [television programme] with the chicken on the table, the money all goes in and provides for meals and things like that, and the fact that I can provide more and Elizabeth can provide quite a chunk as well, is not I'm better than you, it's just how it is.

Henry worked full-time as a youth worker and his wife was employed part-time. Although Henry's work compels him to be away from home at times and to work some evenings, he said he is careful to balance this with sufficient time off to compensate and 'maintain my commitments to my family'. He therefore sought to balance work and family life.

Henry described his relationship with his two teenage stepsons as having gone through a 'bad patch', but stated that it is much better now. He has always been involved in discipline and control and this has led to conflicts between him and his stepsons during the past four years (see Chapter 6). Issues have arisen over the teenagers drinking too much alcohol, taking drugs, staying out late, behaving rudely when they return home, or staying home all day lying in front of the television. 'Whether stepparent, natural parent or no family at all, I think they'd still be like that.' However, he says that Elizabeth has encouraged him to take on this role and has continued to support him throughout (see Chapter 6). He has not experienced the same conflicts with his stepdaughter, although she is twelve, and 'relationships get a bit strained when you tell a twelve-year-old she will tidy her bedroom before her friends come over.'

Initially Henry said that he resented contact from the children's non-resident father and wished that he was dead: 'it would be definite... it would be easier for me to cope if I was a replacement. I wasn't, I was just sort of an "also-ran".' Initially, when the non-resident father called for the children, Henry would hide in the toilet. However, he realised this was ridiculous. He initially found the continued contact from the non-resident father a constraint on his stepfathering (see Chapter 7): it felt like 'things were going somewhere and all of a sudden he'd ring up.' Having met the non-resident father, Henry said that he understood more about how it was difficult for him to also manage the 'contact' meetings and how he was probably missing out on more of the children's development and growing up than was Henry. Although Henry and the non-resident father do not have a relationship, Henry says he understands the place he has in the children's lives and supports the contact for as long as the children wish it to continue.

Henry has been completely involved in all aspects of childcare from the outset (rated as 16/18 for involvement in Chapter 5). He described changing nappies, bathing, and providing for all the needs of his stepdaughter when he became co-resident. He shared in making appointments, taking children to appointments, and caring for them when they were sick. He explained that he could adjust his work commitments to suit the family's needs. If Elizabeth was not at work, however, she would equally be involved.

As Henry stated above (section 7.4), he felt that the birth of his children had 'cemented' the family. He said that rather than feel like a father or a stepfather, he feels part of a group that is called a family.

At times it's important, sure, and there are roles I have to play, but I don't know the demarcation lines are as clear as they once were in terms of being a stepparent or parent. There seems to be a shifting of boundaries and roles and edges. I'm not uncomfortable with all that, it seems a natural thing to do. I'm not sure what all that says, but as far as I'm concerned I'm a father and a stepfather but I'm also other things at various times, and all of this seems perfectly OK.

In describing how he viewed the future, Henry talked about the children growing up and doing well or not well, as circumstances would develop. He could not identify how this would differ between fathers and stepfathers 'who want the best for their kids'. Henry reflected on his role as follows:

I don't think we [Henry and Elizabeth] have particular roles in the house which are particularly mother and father roles, we have jobs that need doing and tasks that need performing, responsibilities that need carrying out, but we both do them. So I suppose you could take that along to another level, fathers, stepfathers, that doesn't exist anymore, it is parenting rather than fathering or mothering. We have responsibility for young people, we accept the responsibility and do the best we can, I think that's how it is.

In contrast to Bill and Harold, Henry's commitment began when he gave Elizabeth, whom he had known for only a few weeks, his door key. He then took

on responsibilities for a major share of the household finances, and had legally set in place a transfer of his assets to his wife and children in the event of his death. Henry had also become fully involved in all aspects of child-care including doctors, schools, and health. He had also attempted to deal sensitively with the issues and conflicts that ensued with his teenage stepsons partly as a result of his involvement in discipline and control, which he also identified as an aspect of child-care. He summarised the success of his approach in the following comment: 'All the kids are still at home and at eighteen. They coulda gone, but they haven't.'

Henry had worked through his own personal difficulties with regard to the role of the non-resident father and had identified that neither he, Henry, nor Elizabeth had clearly defined roles. Rather they all had responsibilities to do the best for all the children in their care in a less gender specific way than that demonstrated by Bill and Harold. Through this approach, Henry was focused on the well being of the children for whom he and others shared the care. He and they were responsible for the children's moral guidance, financial support, and day-to-day care, and provided a place of sanctuary and security for them to grow into adulthood, or to return to when external factors dictated. Henry had a long-term view of the future, which was firmly 'family-focused'.

8.3 Chapter summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the ways in which stepfathers saw or represented themselves. Although all the men in this study had become stepfathers, not all had understood being stepfathers in the same way. Some were uncertain whether they were stepfathers or not, or whether they were fathers or father figures, whilst others seemed to have a clear image of who they were and what they were doing in stepfamilies. However, they all recognised that they had developed or were in the process of developing connections with

another person's child that went beyond simply being friendly towards them. Even those who were furthest removed from considering themselves to be stepfathers recognised that they were, in some way, a part of their stepchild's life. On a practical level, many stepfathers were doing the sorts of things with and for their stepchildren that would typically be undertaken by co-resident biological fathers. In seeking out the similarities between the men in this study, their differences have also come to the fore. What has become clear is that although socially and technically the label of stepfather is applied to all these men, the way they represent and 'do' stepfathering differs considerably.

Three groups of stepfathers were identified, based on their own self-representation and a constellation of characteristics, and one case from each group was discussed in detail. Because of the diversity of characteristics, not all participants fit neatly within the category to which they have been assigned. 'Mum's boyfriends' were not a uniform group in that some saw the future as 'family-focused', others as 'couple-focused', and some were 'exit-focused'. They expressed uncertainty regarding future commitments to stepfamilies, and had the lowest scores for relationship satisfaction with their partners compared with the other two groups. They tended to have lower involvement with stepchildren's activities than the other two groups, made limited commitments to stepchildren, and took on few responsibilities, financial, moral or social. They had the shortest period of co-residence, and their lack of involvement with stepchildren could be regarded as an indicator of their sensitivity to stepchildren, in that they were 'new' to stepfathering, and sought to become involved gradually. It is difficult to support this contention, however, as many had not given a great deal of consideration to the needs of stepchildren prior to becoming co-resident. Whereas 'Co-operative caretakers', who had a similar mean period of co-residence, had much greater involvement, and had given consideration to their stepchildren's needs prior to becoming co-resident. In

contrast to the other two groups of stepfathers, 'Mum's boyfriends' tended to regard stepchildren as the responsibility of their biological parents. As such, non-resident fathers were viewed as a resource, which assisted 'Mum's boyfriends' to maintain their situation of limited responsibility and commitment to their stepfamilies. 'Mum's boyfriends' earned the lowest incomes of all three groups while their partners were the highest earners of all three groups. This suggests that, from the perspective of their partners, they may not be ideal long-term stepfathers. As Buss and Schmitt (1993) noted, indicators of commitment are desirable attributes when seeking long-term partners.

'Traditionalists' identified most strongly with a clearly defined image of who they were. Those who were biological fathers described themselves as 'dads', those who were not described themselves as 'stepdads'. They were moderately involved with stepchildren's activities; more involved than 'Mum's boyfriends' but less involved than 'Co-operative caretakers'. They expressed greater clarity about their responsibilities and commitments than 'Mum's boyfriends', and were sensitive to the needs of stepchildren and their own children by considering their needs prior to and after becoming co-resident. In contrast to 'Mum's boyfriends', 'Traditionalists' were the main breadwinners in their households; they also had clearly defined roles for children's mothers and non-resident fathers. In contrast to 'Mum's boyfriends', two thirds of 'Traditionalists' were married. They demonstrated some commitments and responsibilities to stepfamilies, which in contrast to the 'Co-operative caretakers', tended to reflect a gendered image of parenting roles. Non-resident fathers were more likely to be regarded as a constraint than a resource on stepfathers' decision taking for the step-household, and this was likely to be the case until stepchildren had left home. They had a longer-term view of their future within stepfamilies than 'Mum's boyfriends', and had been co-resident for longer than the other two groups. Whilst two were 'exit-focused' the others were either 'couple-focused' or

'family-focused'. However, 'Traditionalists' were more satisfied with the relationship quality with their partners than 'Mum's boyfriends'.

'Co-operative caretakers' were distinct from the other two groups in that they identified with parenting in a more particularistic way, as one of several caretakers, *sharing* the care of a child with the mother and biological father. In contrast to the other two groups, 'Co-operative caretakers' had the highest incomes and worked slightly less hours. They were the most highly involved of the three groups, and demonstrated commitment and responsibility to stepfamilies in the ways that they contributed financially, morally, and socially. Three quarters of this group were married, and most had a child born since becoming stepfathers. In contrast to the 'Traditionalists', they did not identify with the same clearly defined image of being a 'dad' or 'stepdad'. They were sensitive to the needs of stepchildren; all had considered them prior to becoming co-resident, and all were involved in discipline and control as an aspect of child-care. They prioritised the needs of stepchildren; they were involved in all activities, and negotiated their roles as circumstances changed or developed, explicitly and implicitly, with the well being of the child uppermost in their decision-making. They were supported throughout by their partners. They had the highest scores for satisfaction with their relationships with their partners, and all had long-term visions of their futures within and for their 'families'.

These findings suggest a diversity of stepfathering practices shaped by a variety of circumstances, which define the ways in which stepfathers view their identities and understand parenting. 'Mum's boyfriends' were less certain than others with regard to their present role and to their future within that role. 'Traditionalists' were more certain about their position within their families and the future of their families. 'Co-operative caretakers' appeared less constrained

and were able to write their own scripts to meet the changing parenting needs of stepchildren. As Marsiglio noted, an approach such as this 'is essential in a context where clear social guidelines are lacking, and norms and guidelines are constructed and negotiated in a more fluid... way' (2004: 243). The prospect of successful stepfathering is enhanced when stepfathers approach stepfathering with regard for the best interests of the children concerned.

potentially, a further six percent of all families were stepfamilies with non-resident stepchildren only.

For many adults, cohabitation and marriage have become lifestyle choices to be sustained only for as long as they provide satisfaction (Giddens, 1992; Allan and Crow, 2001; see Burgoyne, 1991 for an early review). When a marriage ends, this is increasingly regarded less as family breakdown and more as a process of family restructuring (Rosenthal and Keshet, 1981). Additionally, a sizeable minority of women have children outside of marriage (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000), outside cohabiting relationships, and by more than one father (Dowd, 2000). These changes have brought about a necessary change to the ways in which families are understood. Families can no longer be regarded as a socially constructed, static event that people *live in*, rather they have become conceptualised as a series of transitions that people *live* (Hetherington and Camara, 1984; Morgan, 1999).

One of the major implications of these changes in family demographics for men is that many will have several relationships, serially, throughout their adult lives. Some of these men will become partially or fully co-resident stepfathers. As the majority of children continue to live with their mothers post-divorce (Stone, 1977; Seltzer, 1994; CSA, 2001), many men will live apart from their own children whilst co-residing with someone else's children.

1.5 Defining stepfamilies

Defining what constitutes a stepfamily has proved to be complex, for example, Burgoyne and Clark (1984), in their Sheffield study, identified twenty-six ways in which stepfamilies could be formed. Factors such as, structure, previous marital status, and residence of children from previous relationships, contributed to

9 Discussion and conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter is a review of the approach adopted to undertake this study, including the limitations and strengths of the study, the research design and methods, and sampling issues overcome in order to carry out the research. I will set the findings of the study in the context of findings of previous research in the field, and then focus on the specific new findings that have resulted from this study. The wider theoretical and policy implications of the research will be discussed, and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

9.2 Summary of key findings

The expression of men's identities through stepfathering has illustrated the diverse ways that some stepfathers can care for stepchildren by becoming more actively involved than others.

The study has identified three groups of stepfathers based on their identities and perceptions of their roles in stepfamilies: 'Mum's boyfriends' were potentially the least stable of the three groups, and had the least involvement with stepchildren, they lacked clarity regarding their current role and their future with their stepfamilies. 'Traditionalists' had more clearly defined parenting roles, and were 'moderately' involved, in keeping with a more traditionally gendered pattern of parenting. They were clearer about their roles than 'Mum's boyfriends' and were more satisfied with their relationships with their partners.

'Co-operative caretakers' were 'highly' involved with stepchildren's activities and had made most changes to their own work patterns, which enabled them to spend more time with stepchildren. They were more involved in activities that were stepchild focused than either 'Mum's boyfriends', or 'Traditionalists'. They had adopted a more equitably gendered pattern of sharing parenting of the children in their care, and were the most satisfied with their relationships with their partners (see Section 9.4 for a discussion of the key elements of stepfathers' identities such as, types of involvement, experience of fathering, and negotiation of responsibilities).

Children's mothers were the 'gatekeepers' to stepfathers' involvement, in particular with regard to their involvement in discipline and control of stepchildren. Participants regarded their involvement in discipline and control as a responsibility of parenting, they anticipated, and experienced, some disengagement of stepchildren: this was variable and largely in line with what they anticipated biological parents would experience. However, the negotiated support of their partners was an essential element of their continued involvement.

9.3 Limitations and strengths of the study

The aim of the research was to seek to uncover the subjective meanings that participants assigned to their daily practices within stepfamilies. I sought to uncover the rich detail of what these men thought, felt and had experienced through becoming stepfathers, the ways in which they were involved with stepchildren, and how their involvement shaped the image they had of themselves as stepfathers. This required a detailed examination of the social processes involved in men becoming and remaining stepfathers, the extent to

which they negotiated their involvement with significant others in their stepfamilies, the resources they drew upon, those factors that constrained them, and the impact these had on stepfathers' development of their own imagery. I set out to study the day-to-day activities of men involved with 'care' of other men's children.

A qualitative in-depth approach was adopted for the purpose of this study, and a semi-structured interview was designed as an appropriate research instrument. This approach provided a unique opportunity to concentrate on listening to participants' accounts of being stepfathers, to further the understanding of stepfathering, and to identify the practices of stepfathers actively engaged in stepfathering.

9.3.1 Evaluation of the research design

As the focus of the research was on stepfathers' perspectives, I did not seek to draw on other family members' perspectives. I did not regard this as essential or the lack of this detrimental to the quality of the information gathered, as the primary focus was to learn about stepfathering from stepfathers' perspectives; it was their subjective accounts, their perceptions, and feelings that were important. A consequence of this approach is that details regarding other family members are incomplete. I have had to rely upon stepfathers' partial knowledge or understanding of circumstances and events that occurred before they became part of the stepfamily, and their knowledge of non-resident fathers which had, in many cases, been learned from others.

Whilst there may be some discrepancies in what stepfathers have recalled, or with the ways in which they have selectively accounted for their past or present activities, they were under no pressure to give me their accounts, and they were not paid to participate. I have sought through the analysis practices I employed

throughout the study to ensure that the accounts were trustworthy. They were frankly given and I believe them to represent the participants' experiences.

The cross-sectional nature of the design for this study has only provided a 'snapshot' of these stepfathers' lives and experiences, as such it is not possible to look at developments over time. The interviews were carried out at one point in time in each of the stepfather's histories, and for each this point had different relevance and meaning, in terms of the transitions they had experienced, and the trajectories they had embarked upon. Whilst I have sought to present the diversity of stepfathering that I uncovered from the sample, had I conducted the study at another point in time on their various trajectories, or repeated the interviews with the same stepfathers at a later point in time, the findings may have been different. My approach to interpreting these accounts presents only one of many possible ways of considering, and describing the experiences of stepfathers, and should be understood in this context.

Whilst I make no claim to have uncovered the whole range of stepfathering possibilities, the accounts reported here have been obtained from different stepfathers, at different points along their individual trajectories, and have resulted in more varied and diverse accounts than might have been obtained were all stepfathers at the same point in their stepfamily development.

9.3.2 Sampling issues

I did not attempt to recruit a representative sample, as might have been sought for a survey of stepfathers from which the main aim was to discern general patterns and commonalities of experience. However, I was aware from the literature review of the limitations often associated with samples obtained for qualitative studies, such as their lack of representativeness. Therefore, I used a

wide range of recruitment strategies in my attempt to include men from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds and with a diversity of experiences as stepfathers.

Initially it was my intention to interview forty stepfathers, as this would be a manageable number, whilst providing scope for internal comparison. However, the difficulties I experienced in recruiting stepfathers who met the eligibility criteria resulted in the final sample numbering thirty-five. The reasons for the difficulties I experienced in obtaining the target sample, despite the extensive efforts made, are similar to those reported by others; many stepfamilies and stepfathers did not use, recognise or identify with the terms 'stepfamily' or 'stepfather' (Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2003; Smith et al., 2001; Robertson, 2004). This may indicate a tension between the private and public stepfamily discourse, and remains an important issue for researchers to contend with.

In line with Smith et al. (2001), stepfathers who did not have children from previous relationships and had none born during their current relationships were most likely to identify with the term 'stepfather'. Those who were biological fathers as well as stepfathers were more likely to use the term 'father' as a descriptor. When stepfathers' self-image was explored in more detail, this study has shown that the majority of participants did not recognise the term 'stepfather' as being meaningful in their circumstances.

In common with previous qualitative stepfamily studies where the sample has not been randomly obtained, this study over-represents white, better educated, middle-class, and employed men. Less well-educated men, men from working-class backgrounds, or from minority ethnic groups were not well represented in the final sample (see Edwards et al., 1999b where similar difficulties were identified).

The engagement of middle-class, relatively affluent men with the press articles or advertisements that I placed, and their interest in stepfathering or contributing to stepfathering research, suggests they had the time and the inclination to enquire and to participate. Men from working-class backgrounds may have interpreted my publicity approaches differently. The majority of working-class participants were recruited by word of mouth, either personally or through intermediaries.

The sample, by design, did not include men who were not co-resident, nor did it include stepfathers who had been co-resident for less than one year, or who co-resided for less than four days per week. As a result the findings must be treated in this light, as they relate to a sample that is small in size and not designed to be representative of all stepfathers. However, the sample was sufficiently large to obtain data relating to a wide range of stepfathering practices, as it included stepfathers with differing histories and experiences, and living in differently configured stepfamily constellations.

In any study involving reflections of the past, participants' recall of events is likely to be made with reference to the present (Nilsen, 1996). Whilst participants may seek to evaluate past events, actions or decisions in the context of the time that they occurred, they will also be contextualised by the present. Burgoyne and Clark (1984) described this as the public scripting of private testimonies. Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) suggested that participants may correct the account they are providing of themselves during the interview; this may be to provide greater accuracy, but participants may also seek to embellish their accounts in the retelling. The subjective element of these accounts relates to the essentially selective nature of the research questions, and to the selectivity of the personal accounts provided by the participants.

Participants in this study may have provided selective accounts shaped by a number of factors for example, their own experiences, or their understanding of stepfathers prior to becoming a stepfather themselves. However, the accounts were clarified where necessary during the interviews by further questioning, and all the stepfathers claimed to be satisfied with the information and stories they had given. I believe the accounts were frankly given, credible and trustworthy as they portray the ways participants experienced and understood stepfathering. Through their accounts they expressed the difficulties they encountered, the emotions they experienced, the pleasures they had gained, and they located their personal identity of the present within their past and in their future.

I found the structure of the semi-structured interview was a valuable asset in guiding me through the interviews. My concern was to obtain extensive detail that accurately reflected how the participants felt about being stepfathers. I knew that I had only one opportunity and was concerned to gather all the data I required at that time. However, as I was sufficiently confident with the subject areas covered, I was able to use the interview schedule more loosely, in the form of an 'aide-memoire'. This worked well and provided a balance between achieving my objectives and not disrupting the narrative flow of the participants. A more open style of interviewing might permit room for greater spontaneity from participants and might open up avenues for investigation beyond those considered in this thesis.

9.4 Discussion of study findings

The increased potential for cohabitation and divorce in second and subsequent family formations is a pointer to the inherent complexities that many men face when entering stepfamilies. As Bill said when referring to post-divorce dating,

‘once you get over thirty, you are probably bound to meet someone with children.’ The aim of this research was to explore stepfathers’ subjective experiences of involvement with stepchildren, the factors that impacted on their experience of involvement, and the ways their involvement shaped their understanding of stepfathering. I turn now to the main findings of the study and how they support the initial contention that stepfathers can be involved, and care for stepchildren.

9.4.1 Stepfathers’ involvement with stepchildren’s activities

Although rates of involvement varied between activities, all stepfathers were involved in at least some family activities, and some activities with stepchildren. Analysis of stepfathers’ involvement indicated that, in line with previous research findings (Brannen et al., 1994; Smith et al., 2001), stepfathers were least likely to be involved with medical care, or caring for children when they were ill; medical issues remained the mother’s responsibility. Stepfathers were most likely to be involved with ‘leisure and pleasure’ activities such as playing with stepchildren or involvement in sporting activities, as participants or spectators. Stepfathers who were more involved with ‘indoor’ activities were also more involved with ‘outdoor’ activities. This is in line with recent findings (see Robertson, 2004). However, in contrast to Robertson’s (2004) findings, many stepfathers were also involved in stepchildren’s educational activities through supervising homework, assisting with library research, listening to reading, or attending school/college events.

Stepfathers who were classified as ‘highly’ involved shared more of the parenting of their stepchildren with their partners than those who had ‘moderate’ or ‘low’ involvement. In order to share parenting ‘highly’ involved stepfathers had made some changes to their work patterns, or reduced their

hours at work, reducing their income, in order to spend more time with stepchildren, or to provide care for stepchildren while their partners went out to work.

9.4.2 Fathering experience

In seeking factors that may have assisted with or been barriers to stepfathers' care, I examined a number of resources available to stepfathers which may have supported or constrained their stepfathering. The first of these resources was stepfathers' experience of their own fathers. All participants recalled some experience of being fathered; some had experienced a 'distant' hegemonic male model of fathering whilst others experienced a more modern model of 'closeness', reflecting a less gendered masculine type of fathering. In line with findings from previous fatherhood studies on men's reflections on their own fathers (see for example, Lupton and Barclay, 1997), the men in this study found they 'must reinvent good fathering' (Snarey, 1993: 311). Most stepfathers' indicated acceptance of satisfactory elements of their experiences of being fathered, and had rejected unsatisfactory experiences. However, experience of distant fathering was not always regarded as disinterested fathering. In line with Snarey's (1993) findings, most stepfathers made allowances based on their perceptions of how men in their fathers' generation had demonstrated more traditional gendered notions of care towards them. Although few recalled their fathers as demonstrably affectionate figures, they affirmed that their fathers had provided the main economic resources for the family.

Secondly, previous researchers (see for example Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991) found that prior fathering experience can provide stepfathers with transferable parenting skills. All stepfathers in this study who were fathers to children from previous relationships had reflected on the ways they practised their fathering.

The majority transferred to their stepfathering aspects of their prior experience that they regarded as satisfactory, and rejected aspects of parenting that they regarded as unsatisfactory. Only two stepfathers focused their parenting mainly on their non-resident children.

Thirdly, almost one-third of stepfathers became fathers in their stepfamilies; eight for the first time. Previous research suggested that where the birth of a child was the stepfather's first child, this may lead to the focus of stepfathers' parenting shifting from their stepchildren to their own children (see for example MacDonald and DeMaris, 1996). The findings of this study were not in line with this contention. Only three stepfathers who had become first-time fathers in their stepfamilies focused their attention on their own children. In two of these cases other factors were involved; in one the spousal relationship had broken down, and in the other the stepfather's own child was two years old and more dependent than the older stepchild. The findings indicated that the birth of a child consolidated stepfathers' notions of 'family' and provided relationship links through step-siblings. This is in line with the earlier contention of Burgoyne and Clark (1984), that the birth of a child within stepfamilies symbolises the 'normality of family life'.

However, first-time fathers reflected on their involvement with stepchildren and their biological children, and said that they felt that being a stepfather was more demanding than being a father. As Jerry said, 'I think if I am going to make a success out of this role, then I have to work harder than I would do if I was their [stepchildren's] father.' Although they stressed that their commitment was to their 'family unit', they felt that it would be difficult to parent their stepchildren and their own children in an equitable manner because of the inherent inequity within stepfamilies. Despite their best efforts there were a number of factors they did not have control over, such as the partial residence of stepchildren who

different definitions. Later research on behalf of the National Stepfamily Association (NSA) identified that there were potentially seventy-two stepfamily permutations (De'Ath, 1994).

Confirmation of a diversity of stepfamilies has rendered a number of narrow definitions inadequate. These have been criticised for their reliance on marriage or on domestic boundaries, and have resulted in an underestimation of the occurrence of stepfamilies (Coleman and Ganong, 1990; Brooks-Gun, 1994). Furthermore, Ferri and Smith (1998) noted that often stepfamily research paid insufficient attention to distinguish between stepfamilies and step-households. The boundaries that define stepfamilies may not always be fixed and may have different meanings for different stepfamily members. Therefore, rather less was known about 'stepfamily networks', relationships that exist beyond household boundaries, than was known about stepfamily households (see also Furstenberg, 1987; Cooney, 1994). As Edwards and colleagues found, the structure and boundaries of family forms that children experienced were complicated, and '[often] it is not clear, in systems terms, who is "inside" and who is "outside" "the family" and family members may wish to pose this in different ways in different contexts' (Edwards et al. 1999b: 19).

Batchelor and colleagues took into consideration these complex issues in seeking to develop an effective definition of what constitutes a stepfamily:

A stepfamily is created when someone who is already a parent forms a relationship with a new partner who then becomes a step-parent to the children. In some stepfamilies both partners have children... They may not all live in the same household, but some with their other birth parent, creating both a full time and part-time stepfamily household. All the children who have connections with a parent or step-parent belong to a stepfamily, and the structure may include two step-parents if both parents have formed new partnerships. A stepfamily also exists when the children are adults, even if they were adults when the stepfamily was

were parented across more than one household, in contrast to the permanent residence of their own children; additional holidays, trips, entertainment and gift giving by non-resident fathers and their relatives, in which their own children were unlikely to participate or share.

9.4.3 Negotiating taking responsibilities

Dowd (2000) indicated that in families mothers are the 'core' parent, supported to a greater or lesser degree by secondary caretakers: fathers, stepfathers and others. Smart and Neale (1999a), Dowd (2000), Smith et al. (2001), and Marsiglio (2004) have demonstrated the importance of the concept of negotiation in understanding men's involvement with children. In line with these conclusions, all stepfathers in this study recognised the primary carer role of their partners.

Negotiation was most frequently referred to in relation to stepfathers' involvement in discipline and control; four-fifths of stepfathers had negotiated their involvement with their partners. Stepfathers regarded involvement in discipline and control as a responsibility of parenting.

Previous research findings indicate that although parenting characterised by warmth, support, and firm, consistent discipline is beneficial to children's adjustment in first-marriage, divorced, and step-families, it can lead to conflict and disengagement of stepchildren when practised by stepfathers (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). However, this study did not identify stepfather-stepchild disengagement, although stepfathers' involvement in discipline and control was not without variability and some reported stepfather-stepchild conflict. Henry described, at length, the difficulties he had experienced as a result of his involvement with discipline and control with both adolescent stepsons (Chapters 6 and 8), yet concluded that his firm and consistent role, supported throughout

by his partner, was appropriate and beneficial. He pointed out that although his two eldest stepchildren were eighteen and could have left home, they had not. When stepfathers' involvement in discipline and control was supported by their partners, any resultant stepfather-stepchild conflict was described as being no worse than stepfathers' imagined it would be between biological fathers and their children. Where stepfathers negotiated their involvement in discipline and control with their partners, and where they retained the support of their partners for their involvement, they reported that this did not lead to undue stepchild-stepfather disengagement.

This study has also shown that partners' support could be withdrawn, and that the extent or type of stepfathers' involvement could be adjusted to meet with partners' wishes. This underpins the centrality of a process of negotiation as a key feature for stepfathers in retaining the confidence of their partners to maintain a shared responsibility for involvement with parenting.

9.5 Stepfathers' identities

As others have identified in previous studies (Ferri and Smith, 1998; Smith et al., 2001), many participants did not see themselves as 'stepfathers'. As Jack said, 'I guess I feel that father and stepfather are misleading terms for what I am.' Participants in this study had developed identities through their involvement in their stepfamilies. The analysis of the data indicated that their self-representations matched particular constellations of 'characteristics', which could be arranged into three broad categories. However, these constellations are only tendencies, and few stepfathers fit exactly into each.

The constellation of 'characteristics' of 'Mum's boyfriends' included having the lowest involvement, the lowest financial commitment to the stepfamily

household, and having co-resided for the shortest time. Any commitments that were made were tempered by a lack of clarity over the participant's view of their future within their stepfamily. Perhaps to emphasise this, no children had been born since forming these relationships, and none were planned. Men in this group were the least satisfied with their relationships with their partners. Their partners, on average, earned more than they did, which may have added to their perception of not being required to make more of a commitment or take more responsibilities. This may also have made their partners more circumspect about long-term arrangements. Non-resident fathers were regarded as a resource in that they reduced the level of financial and childcare responsibility of men in this group. As others have noted, a lack of legal rights and responsibilities (Marsiglio, 1992), and full parental status (Mason et al., 2002) were factors in stepfathers feeling unprepared to integrate into stepfamilies, and to being supporters rather than participants in disciplinary decision-making.

More than half of the 'Traditionalists' were biological fathers to children from previous relationships and regarded the term 'father' or 'dad' as a more apt way of describing who they were. Those who were not biological fathers in this category were more likely to see themselves as 'stepfathers', and used this term to describe themselves. Traditionalists saw themselves as main breadwinners, where work outside the home and wage earning remained a dominant feature of their lives; a provider role was seen as an important element of their image of parenting, 'breadwinning and support of children are inextricably bound together in men's sense of the masculine self' (Catlett et al., 2005: 102). Although they were more involved than 'Mum's boyfriends', 'Traditionalists' used work commitments to legitimate their limited involvement in family activities to those that took place at times of their choosing, and in activities that interested them. As Kurdek and Fine (1991) noted, the clarity with which they defined their roles and those of others in the stepfamilies may have helped to reduce tensions

between them, their partners, and non-resident fathers, increased their involvement with stepchildren, and may have contributed to their greater satisfaction with their parenting, and to their greater satisfaction with their relationships with their partners. 'Traditionalists' who saw themselves as fathers regarded non-resident fathers as intrusive in their step-household decision-making; they were a constraint rather than a resource. They saw this as remaining the case until stepchildren left home and non-resident fathers would no longer be a relevant factor. Those who saw themselves as 'stepfathers' saw a clear distinction between their role and that of non-resident fathers, whose contact with stepchildren was encouraged as it provided an opportunity to be couple-focused.

'Co-operative caretakers' acknowledged that while the term stepfather technically applied to them, it did not meaningfully describe their role; they were men who were involved in providing care for the children in their household, in a three-way partnership that included non-resident fathers, who were seen as a resource with whom to share parenting responsibilities. 'Co-operative caretakers' were the most highly involved, and their daily involvement contributed to shaping their self-image. Many had made changes to their working lives, all were family-focused, and they were the most satisfied with their relationships with their partners. They all had a focus on the well being of the stepchild, as summarised by Ron when he explained, 'What is important is, who the person is to the child, what impact they have and how often they're there.'

9.6 Significant new findings

This study is unique in identifying three groups of participants; 'Mum's boyfriends', 'Traditionalists', and 'Co-operative caretakers', based largely on the perceptions of how the participants saw themselves and their roles in

stepfamilies. Although stepfathers in this sample had diverse histories and experiences, there were some discernable patterns of commonality that related to all, or most, participants in this study. They all acknowledged their partners' centrality in the stepfamily as the primary carer; children's mothers were 'gatekeepers' to involvement and took the lead in disciplinary decision-making. Stepfathers' involvement was negotiated with their partners; most stepfathers were involved in discipline and control, and most stepfathers supported their partners through reinforcing their disciplinary decisions. Most stepfathers were favourably disposed towards non-resident fathers' contact with children. With the exception of 'Mum's boyfriends', stepfathers sought to become involved in responsible parenting, symbolised by their involvement with discipline and control, and making social, financial, and emotional commitments.

'Co-operative caretakers' had some resonance with Burgoyne and Clark's 'progressive stepfamily', with their pluralistic imagery of family life, making choices, responding to constraints and resolving differences (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984: 193). However, 'Co-operative caretakers' in this study had gone beyond this in the ways that they demonstrated a less gendered interpretation of fathering (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006), and a more equitably gendered pattern of couple relations, in their care for the next generation (Dollahite et al, 1996; Dowd, 2000). They had chosen to become involved in activities that were centred on stepchildren's needs rather than their own. They had dedicated their time, resources and energy to promoting their stepchildren's well being, which in some instances required sacrifices on their part, such as reducing their income, reducing hours at work, changing work location and work patterns in order to be more family-focused, and to spend more time with stepchildren.

In contrast to 'Mum's boyfriends' who did not perceive themselves as having financial responsibilities to their stepfamilies, and to 'Traditionalists' who

perceived themselves to be 'breadwinners', 'Co-operative caretakers' did not perceive themselves as being in a sole 'provider' role in their stepfamilies. They acknowledged that they provided the majority of the financial capital, yet recognised this was one resource amongst others, for example, social and cultural capital, in a shared provision along with their partners, and stepchildren's non-resident fathers, in maximising the future well being of stepchildren. Although previous researchers have referred to these attributes in biological fathers as a 'calling' (Dollahite et al., 1996: 356), or 'spiritual' (Dowd, 2000: 176), 'Co-operative caretakers' indicated that their focus was on the day-to-day work of responsible parenting in a changing family environment whilst retaining a focus on the consequences for the children. They expressed the greatest level of satisfaction in their relationships with their partners.

This study has made a contribution to stepfather literature by uncovering differences in experiences and understandings of what stepfathering means to stepfathers in different stepfamily settings and the ways stepfathers can contribute, in terms of care, to the shared parenting of the next generation.

9.7 Theoretical implications

This study was designed to be exploratory and was not designed to examine different theories of fathering. However, the findings from this study can be used to comment on the study of stepfathers' involvement, the implications of which may help to synthesise existing knowledge and to suggest avenues for future research. Although the challenges to stepfathers' involvement have been well documented (Thomson et al., 1992; Fine and Kurdek, 1995; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Hanson et al., 1996), some previous stepfamily studies have indicated that stepfathers can be relatively active participants in their stepfamilies, where they make a positive contribution to stepchildren (Ferri and

Smith, 1998; White and Gilbreth, 2001; Mason, et al., 2002; Hofferth and Anderson, 2003; Robertson, 2004). By taking as a starting point for the analysis the recognition that, in Morgan's (1996) terms, contemporary families are defined less by structure and more by sets of activities that have particular meanings, enabled me to conceptualise stepfathering as a set of activities engaged in by stepfathers.

The literature on paternal care has focused largely on biological fathers' care for their own children, and not on stepfathers' care for stepchildren. However, Lamb (1997), Palkowitz (1997), and Pleck (1997) suggested that the 'interactional' and 'affective' benefits that Stryker (1968) identified as experienced by biological fathers through involvement in care for their children, and expressed in terms of better father-child relations and better spousal relations, can also be experienced and expressed by social fathers. Weeks et al. (2001) drew upon Morgan's concept of family practices and Finch and Mason's (1993) concept of negotiated kin relationships in their research on same sex 'families of choice', thus affirming the active creation and development of these 'families' and the identities this conferred on those involved.

In developing a conceptual framework that has drawn on aspects of the concept of nurture as expressed by fatherhood researchers, the sub-concepts within an ethic of care (Tronto, 1993), and the concepts of elective family practices, it has been possible to demonstrate that active involvement in stepfamilies and caring relationships, only previously alluded to, extends to stepfathers.

Smith et al. (2001), Smith (2004), and (Vogt Yuan and Hamilton, 2006) have indicated that there is an important link between stepfather-stepchild relations, stepfather-non-resident father relations, and outcomes for stepchildren, and stepfather-partner relationship quality. For 'Co-operative caretakers' a number

of factors were present that were less evident or absent from the other categories: high involvement with stepchildren's activities, involvement with discipline and control, expressions of satisfaction with relations with stepchildren, support for continued contact with non-resident fathers, and satisfaction with relationships with partners. Whilst the findings suggest these factors are important, it is not possible to discern the direction of the relationship or the precise factors that have contributed to more involved and satisfied stepfathering. It remains unclear for example, whether stepfathers' perceptions of better spousal relationship quality encourage them to be more involved with stepchildren, or whether greater involvement with stepchildren, and maintaining good relations with non-resident fathers encourages stepfathers' partners to have a closer relationship with stepfathers.

Negotiation of fathers' access to children has been examined in post-divorce settings (Smart and Neale, 1999a), in families (Dowd, 2000), and in stepfamilies (Marsiglio, 2004). This study has confirmed that stepfathers' negotiation of their involvement with stepchildren was an important feature of developing their stepfathering roles through their involvement with stepchildren's activities and the parenting identities that developed from their involvement. Whilst Dollahite and colleagues focused on the 'dimensions of good fathering' (Dollahite et al., 1996: 356), it is important to recognise that these may be inaccessible to men in circumstances where they are less open to negotiation with their partners.

9.8 Implications for policy and practice

Whilst this research was not embarked upon with the aim of providing knowledge for action, as Hammersley (2000) referred to policy-oriented research, there are a number of implications appropriate for policy development

that can be drawn from the findings of this study. Although the notion of the ever-married family retains its appeal politically, socially, and economically, the number of households that contain a couple and their children has declined. The flux and fluidity that are characteristics of contemporary family living through formation, dissolution and re-formation of adult relationships, have rendered the notion of 'the family' as one that bears little relation to many people's lived realities (Seltzer, 2000). More than ever the birth of children is occurring outside marriage. Therefore, more men will become serial fathers and social fathers. As Marsiglio and colleagues (2002) noted when studying young men, in a society where income earning potential, the work force and corporate culture are gender segregated, these will continue to influence perceptions of what constitutes provider and carer roles.

The findings from this study indicate that the majority of the stepfathers interviewed were 'making a go' of their stepfathering, and 'Co-operative caretakers' indicated ways in which stepfathers could make a better go of stepfathering. Policy makers may wish to consider ways that support and encourage men in general, and stepfathers in particular, to value nurture, regardless of marital status or household boundaries, as contributing to their masculinities, and aid the development of an environment which encourages a 'moral disposition' or a 'moral type of conduct' (Tronto, 1993: 177). Sevenhuijsen (2000) posited that individuals can exist only because they are members of various networks of care and responsibility, and the self can exist only through and with others. Thus, in Giddens (1991) terms, both 'self' and 'others' are beneficiaries, which he extrapolates to conferring benefits to society in terms of better social and family relations.

This study highlighted that for most of the participants, this was the first time they had talked to anyone about what it meant for them to be stepfathers.

Several said they felt that through participating in the interviews they had gained insights into their stepfathering practices, and would discuss issues raised in the interviews with their partners or stepchildren. Whilst not all stepfathers would welcome guidance, it is evident that some would. A greater emphasis on advice and support for stepfathers and stepfamilies in the community, through 'drop-in' centres or via the internet may enable men (and women) to become better informed about stepfathering in diverse family settings. This could provide opportunities for those contemplating forming stepfamilies and for those in existing stepfamilies to discuss ways of describing stepfamily members, negotiation of roles and relationships with children and non-resident fathers, and explore ways that stepfathers can share the parenting of stepchildren with other significant adults.

Continuing parental responsibility of post-divorce non-resident fathers following the implementation of the Children Act (1989) has impacted on stepfathers. As the findings from this study have shown, more non-resident fathers are remaining in contact, and are frequently involved with their children. Many stepfathers are uncertain how to engage with non-resident fathers, only a few have had conversations with them, yet they remain an important factor in stepfathers' lives. The centrality of stepfathers' negotiation of their involvement with their partners has been highlighted by the study. There is a potential for policy development that focuses on factors that encourage negotiation of roles within and across household boundaries which may encourage a greater sharing of responsibilities between stepfathers and non-resident fathers.

Stepfathers also expressed their frustration when, regardless of their level of involvement with their stepfamilies, they were excluded from any proceedings that involved social workers, lawyers, court proceedings, and technically from schools.

created by a parent's new marriage or partnership (Batchelor et al., 1994: 10).

The strength of this definition is that it acknowledges the increasing fluidity of relationships and family living. It moves beyond the idea that all stepfamily relationships emanate from a previously married relationship of which the partners have re-married, it is not restricted to heterosexual relationships, and it recognises that stepfamilies are not constrained by household boundaries. Within this definition it is possible to identify sub-categories that will assist in differentiating between types of stepfamilies. Therefore, I have adopted this definition as a basis upon which to identify stepfamilies for this study.

1.5.1 Stepfamily typologies

To assist in the understanding of stepfamily diversity, researchers have developed a number of stepfamily typologies, although frequently using different evaluative measures. Examples of these are Robinson's (1980) four-part typology based on divorce and re-marriage; Burgoyne and Clark's (1984) five-element typology based on the subjects' own evaluation and goals they set for their stepfamilies; a nine-element typology based on stepfamily complexity and residence developed by Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley (1987); and Papernow's (1993) four-element 'developmental life-cycle' typology. Berger developed a three-element typology based on the 'dynamic features of family functioning rather than socio-demographic features' (Berger, 1995: 36), maintaining that the criteria for assessing stepfamilies should be relevant to the unique features of stepfamilies, and should be used to further the understanding of stepfamilies rather than comparing them with non-stepfamilies.

A number of researchers (see, for example, Burgoyne and Clark, 1981; Clingempeel et al., 1984; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994) have referred to a

Policy initiatives should review the ways in which stepfathers have been excluded from the family agenda, and seek to include them more actively for example, by placing a greater emphasis on promoting parental responsibility agreements for stepfathers (and stepmothers), and supporting all the adults who are involved in parenting children in stepfamilies more equitably.

9.9 Future directions

The study was cross-sectional and as such is able only to make cautious, speculative conclusions regarding the stepfathers in the study. Whilst I have sought to highlight the detailed ways in which 'Co-operative caretakers' practised their stepfathering, there remains a great deal more to be learned about those men categorised as 'Mum's boyfriends'. This appeared to be a transitional category where some would leave, and others might become 'Traditionalists', or 'Co-operative caretakers'. Is it possible for men to remain 'Mum's boyfriends' for a longer period? Would time diminish the commitment of 'Co-operative caretakers' to continue to share their parenting with non-resident fathers, and to continue to respond sensitively to the needs of stepchildren? Would they assert their own needs more, or would non-resident fathers assert theirs less and 'Co-operative caretakers' become more like 'Traditionalists', and become more couple-focused, or would they look forward to becoming step-grandparents, and continue to be involved with care of their grandchildren, in similar ways to the ways they cared for their stepchildren? Some of the men in this study will undoubtedly become former stepfathers; little is known about the ways in which they will seek to, or be able to, maintain relations with stepchildren with whom they developed social or emotional bonds. Future research taking a longitudinal perspective could usefully address these

questions and establish the stability, or future trajectories, of each of the groups identified in this study.

This study has shown how men do fathering, in the broadest sense, and how this has helped shape their masculinities. Whilst 'Mum's boyfriends' have held back from involvement, and 'Traditionalists' have held to a narrower understanding of masculinity, 'Co-operative caretakers' have drawn on a range of factors beyond those associated with a traditional masculine role. Future research can build on this and may valuably be located within a framework that makes gender a central analytic category.

Non-resident fathers featured prominently in stepfathers' accounts; the majority remained in contact with stepchildren. Although most stepfathers had little personal contact with non-resident fathers, they appeared to be greatly affected by what they perceived was a controlling influence over decision-making within the step-household. 'Co-operative caretakers', and those who had non-resident children of their own being step-fathered by other men, talked about trying to communicate, negotiate or to liaise with these other men with whom they were sharing the parenting of children; they talked of frequently being rebuffed. The stepfamily constellations represented in this study only included situations where one non-resident father existed. Issues for stepfathers in each of the three categories identified will undoubtedly become more complex where they have formed a relationship with a woman who has children with more than one biological father, or where previous stepfathers have been involved, and where all are non-resident and all, or some, remain in contact with the stephousehold.

Non-resident fathers have proved to be a 'harder to reach' category, in research terms, than stepfathers (see Edwards et al., 1999b). Although researchers may have to adopt different research strategies to reach these men, understanding

stepfamilies will be enhanced where their perspectives on negotiating sharing parenting with other men are more fully represented.

The concept of stepfathers' care for stepchildren requires further detailed study. Future research should seek to confirm these preliminary findings and attempt to determine a process and sequencing of stepfathers' involvement. This would require a larger sample than was currently feasible, and the potential to study stepfathers longitudinally. This could valuably shed light on what becomes of those stepfathers in the least stable category; 'Mothers' boyfriends'. It could also offer insights into changes in stepfathers' perceptions of caring over time, as circumstances change within stepfamilies.

As the majority of the participants in this study, in line with the findings of others, rejected the terms 'stepfamily' and 'stepfather', this perhaps indicates that these terms relate more to a structural definition of circumstances and less to the participants' lived experiences of actively 'doing' family. It suggests that conceptualising men in contemporary families in terms of a lens that focuses on the nurture and care they are involved in providing, with other significant adults, is an appropriate way forward in developing our understanding of contemporary families.

9.10 Conclusions

'Stepfathers' stories told in their own words, are rare' (Marsiglio, 2004: 265). This research is one of the few qualitative studies to have examined, in detail, stepfathers' involvement, solely from the perspective of stepfathers. The study set out to develop knowledge of stepfathering by exploring the social processes of stepfathers' involvement with their stepfamilies, to examine differences and similarities in stepfathers' involvement across different types of stepfamilies,

and to identify factors that impacted upon stepfathers' experiences of involvement. The study has shown that there is a diversity of stepfathers' involvement with stepfamilies. Stepfathers can be highly involved with stepchildren and, when they are, the outcomes for stepfathers can enhance their self-image and their perception of their relationship quality with their partners. However, the study has demonstrated that even among those highly involved, it is not merely a transfer of attributes from biological fathers to stepfathers; 'Co-operative caretakers' did not perceive that they were replacements for non-resident fathers. Rather, they had embarked upon a project that now included a number of adults whose focus, commitment and responsibility was the promotion of the well being of the children in their care.

Recent research findings indicated that when stepfathers were more involved with stepchildren (Vogt Yuan and Hamilton, 2006), and where step-parents had good 'marital' relationships (Smith et al., 2001), there were better outcomes for the stepchildren concerned. Smith (2004) concluded that when children maintained good relations with their non-resident fathers, this did not preclude them having good relations with their stepfathers, and vice-versa. In the absence of data from stepchildren in this study, it is not possible to speculate whether stepchildren living with 'Co-operative caretakers' would be likely to experience better outcomes than stepchildren with stepfathers in other categories. In the absence of any follow-up data on these stepfathers, I can only speculate that when these parenting factors come together, as they did with 'Co-operative caretakers', the long-term prospects for these stepfathers and stepfamilies are potentially better, in terms of continuing to live together, the quality of experience of stepfamily life, and relationships between stepfamily members, than for stepfathers and stepfamilies in the other two categories. However for some, especially those in more recently formed stepfamilies, it may be that their situations and relationships will change in time.

Stepfathering is a world where there are no clear norms and guidelines. Predictions of increased adult relationship transitions suggest that many more men will enter this world in the future (Ermisch, 2001; Haskey, 2001). As this study has indicated, 'Mum's boyfriends' expressed considerable uncertainty with regard to the role they had within stepfamilies. Although 'Traditionalists' had a clearer idea of norms and guidelines, these appeared to be closer to a more masculinist parenting model. Whilst child well being was not the topic of this research, when stepfathers focus on the needs of children in their care, as with the 'Co-operative caretakers', this opens up opportunities for some men to write their own parenting scripts in conjunction with others sharing care.

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of stepfathers, from their perspectives, and to listen to their voices, to identify the subjective aspects of how stepfathers related to their stepchildren, and how some became more involved than others with stepchildren. Through an examination of stepfathers' accounts of their stepfathering experiences, I sought a deeper understanding of the meanings of stepfathering. I believe I have achieved this in a number of respects. Firstly, during the initial pilot study, I was able to learn about some of the issues that were important to stepfathers such as contact with non-resident fathers, and stepfather-partner relationship quality. I was able to incorporate this material into developing the interviews. Secondly, by interviewing stepfathers I have gained an insight into their world, where they have shared the challenges they face. Thirdly, throughout the analyses chapters I made extensive use of quotes, and summaries of participants' accounts of their experiences. These were rich in detail, and this approach was in keeping with the aim of emphasising the participants' stories.

I have learned, through this study, that stepfathers lead varied lives, some more complex than others. However, the majority did not find the term 'stepfather' meaningful. They related to, and cared for stepchildren in varied and different ways. The majority maintained good or reasonable relationships with stepchildren, and where they had children of their own, sought to maintain the best possible relations, for their partners, their children and stepchildren, to balance the different needs of all involved. Some stepfathers were sensitive to, and mindful of, the needs of their stepchildren. At times, they were less directly involved, in order that non-resident fathers could play a more prominent part in certain activities. At other times, they were more involved with the responsibilities of parenting; disciplining when required, and being supportive emotionally, socially, and financially.

Although it could be argued that participation in this study indicated a bias towards men who were particularly interested in the topic, and in the well being of their stepchildren, I believe that the methods I used in sampling and identifying a group of stepfathers to take part in the research, would have reduced these biases. The indications were that many of the participants had not previously explicitly discussed the challenges they faced in their stepfather roles. They were, however, eager to tell their stories, to explore and to explain their own feelings. Although each one had a different story and distinct feelings, I believe that the desire to do well by their stepchildren was common to the majority of these stepfathers. A minority of men additionally demonstrated that they were willing to make changes to a traditional work-oriented, primary-earner role, in order to do more care. Whilst stepfathering is not the same as biological fathering, and some stepfathers are more involved than others, this study has identified that the potential suggested by some fatherhood researchers, for men to care and nurture children to whom they are not biologically related, exists. Future research that focuses on the ways in which stepfathers engage in

scripting their identities, in conjunction with children's mothers and non-resident fathers, will be required to confirm these findings, and will offer guidance and support to the men and women involved, as families evolve and change across the life-course.

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typology based on the adults' previous family histories that describes stepfamilies as either 'simple' or 'complex'. In 'simple' stepfamilies the stepparent has no children of their own. In 'complex' stepfamilies both adults forming the step-relationship have children of their own.

I considered that a typology that focused on stepfamilies with an emphasis on the stepfathers' previous family histories was appropriate for this study, and I have adopted the terms 'simple' and 'complex' as used by Clingempeel et al. (1984) and Hetherington and Jodl (1994). I will use the term 'simple' to refer to stepfather families where stepfathers had no children of their own from previous relationships. However, the term 'complex' is a rather broad category, and has been used to include stepfathers who had children of their own prior to forming stepfamilies, and stepfathers who subsequently became biological fathers for the first time. Findings by MacDonald and DeMaris (1996) suggested it was appropriate to differentiate between men who were fathers prior to becoming stepfathers and men who became fathers after becoming stepfathers.

In order to distinguish between these two types of complex stepfather families, Smith and colleagues restricted the use of the term 'complex' to refer to those stepfathers who were fathers to their own children from previous relationships. They introduced the term 'simple-plus' to describe stepfathers who became biological fathers for the first time in their stepfamilies and 'complex-plus' to describe stepfathers who were fathers prior to becoming stepfathers and who became fathers again in their stepfamilies (Smith et al., 2001). I have followed the practice of Smith et al. (2001) in so far as I have adopted the 'simple-plus' category to identify stepfathers who became biological fathers for the first time after becoming stepfathers, and to distinguish them from stepfathers with no biological children of their own (simple), and stepfathers who were biological fathers prior to forming stepfamilies (complex). However, I have not used the

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term 'complex-plus' in this study. As the sample in this current study was small, I anticipated that there would be insufficient stepfathers in this category to make differentiating at this level meaningful. I will refer to stepfathers who were biological fathers prior to becoming stepfathers and who have had further children of their own during their step-relationship as 'complex', based on their first experience of biological fatherhood. Therefore, in this study, I have referred to stepfathers in three categories based on their first experience of biological fatherhood. The first category, 'simple', refers to stepfathers with no children of their own. The second category, 'simple-plus', describes stepfathers who had no children of their own prior to becoming stepfathers and who have since become first-time biological fathers. The third category, 'complex', refers to stepfathers who were fathers to their own children prior to becoming stepfathers, a small number of whom may also have fathered a child since becoming stepfathers. This typology will provide a basis for the initial comparative analysis discussed later (see Chapters 4 and 5).

1.6 Theorising family practices

Changes in adult relationship patterns have been accompanied by a moral and philosophical change. Marriage is no longer regarded by many as a '...natural condition whose durability can be taken for granted short of certain extreme circumstances' (Giddens, 1992: 137). The institutionally defined state of marriage has become one of negotiated partnerships (Allan and Crow, 2001). For many people, their adult experience will mean more than one marriage, broken, in most cases, not by the death of a spouse, but by divorce. Divorce enables both parties to remarry, should they choose to. These periods of marriage are interspersed with periods of living alone and/or periods of cohabitation prior to remarriage, or increasingly instead of remarriage. Periodic re-partnering is becoming the norm (Popenoe, 1994; Burns, 1995) and has

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resulted in a situation, which has been described as 'serial monogamy', where adults choose to live with different partners in a sequential manner.

Giddens suggests that the notion of a lifetime of commitment based on romantic love has largely been replaced by one of emotional satisfaction, which he describes as 'confluent love'. He regards the increasing trend to re-partner as a significant phenomenon based on a process of reflexivity in the 'democratisation of daily life' (Giddens, 1992: 95). Through this discourse, adults reflect on themselves in relation to traditional social relations, gender, norms, beliefs and obligations. The continuation of these 'pure relationships' is dependent upon negotiation of commitment and the level of self-fulfilment experienced within relationships. Rather than following a predetermined structure, this discourse enables adults to create their own identities and make their own commitments (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Weeks et al., 2001). Obligations that men have to remain committed to relationships have become less determined by traditional normative values and are more open to be negotiated within each partner relationship (Smart and Neale, 1999a).

The fluidity and change associated with this theoretical concept of relationship formation leads to the disassembling and re-assembling of adult relationships and consequently new roles for those adults concerned, in particular for fathers and stepfathers as they move in and out of relationships and households. In so doing, kinship relationships, which were hitherto based on normative guidelines of family relations, with the inclusion of in-laws, become subject to negotiation. The degree to which new family members become a part of kinship networks 'frames the negotiation of solidarity and responsibility within these family relevant relationships' (Allan et al., 2001). Thus, the term 'family' has come to mean a description of broader relationships than those associated with the traditional notion of relationships based on lineage and biology, and refers

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"STEPFATHER 2000" QUESTIONNAIRE



Hi! My name is Keith Burn and I would like to thank you for accessing this page.

The questionnaire that follows has been designed for a particular research project which I am working on as a research student at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, London.

The Aim of this Research Project

As you will no doubt be aware, much research has been conducted on stepfamilies either with a particular reference to stepmothers, or, frequently drawing comparisons between stepfamily and nuclear family stereotypes. However, research into the role of the stepfather is still at an early stage of development and I would like to take this opportunity to look at this area in more detail. This research project intends to focus on the role of the stepfather. By adopting a positive view of this role I will attempt to highlight the features that make being a stepfather a difficult, yet often a rewarding role.

Statement of Confidentiality

I wish to make it perfectly clear that this research project has no links whatsoever with any government agencies, neither will they, nor any third party, have access to any of the information gathered during this project. All the information received will be aggregated for the purpose of analysis and it will not be possible to identify any individual as a result of this process.

Equally, no individual names or personal details will be quoted anywhere or at any time. Once the data has been transcribed all information received will be shredded and destroyed.

Eligibility: You are eligible to complete this questionnaire if you can answer YES to one of the following 2 statements.

1. I am currently living in a stepfamily household, in the role of a stepfather, even if I do not refer to myself as such, and I have stepchildren between the ages of 3 and 18 years.

Stepfather 2000 Questionnaire 1

2. I have lived in a stepfamily household, but no longer do so, and I have stepchildren between the ages of 3 and 18 years.

Stepfather 2000 Questionnaire 2

If you require further information or advice about stepfamily matters, contact:

National Stepfamily Association. (UK)
or Canadian Stepfamily Association

If you would like to be involved with this research project further, or if you would like a copy of the results once completed, there is an opportunity to indicate either or both at the end of the questionnaire.

Thank you again for your time so far and I hope you will feel sufficiently supportive of this project to contribute a few more minutes to complete the questionnaire.

**Stepfather 2000 Research Project Questionnaire designed by
project leader: Keith Burn, project consultant: Michael Pollard and
created by: Niazy Kioufi at Web Creations**

"Stepfather 2000" Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire below, your time and effort is appreciated.

Your Name : (optional)

Telephone : (optional)

Email address : (if applicable)

Q1. I am presently living within a stepfamily household:

(a) Yes

(b) No

If your response to the above is NO then [click here](#) to complete the relevant questionnaire.

SECTION A

This section now asks you to give details of your current stepfamily relationship and living arrangements.

Q2a. Do you see yourself as a stepfather?

(a) Yes

(b) No

Q2b. If No; what do you see yourself as?

Q3. What term do you tend to use when referring to your partner's/wife's children?

(a) 'The Children' (b) 'My partner's/wife's children'

(c) 'My stepchildren' (d) Other (please specify)

Q4. How do the children of your partner/wife address you?

Q5. How do you describe your current marital status?

- (a) Married (b) Cohabiting (c) Single
- (d) Widowed (e) Divorced (f) Separated

Q6. How many years have you been living in your current relationship?

Q7. How many children are you the biological father to?

- (a) From previous relationships?
- (b) How many of these continue to live with you?

Q8. How many children is your partner/wife the biological mother to?

- (a) From previous relationships?
- (b) How many of these continue to live with you?

Q9. How many children are you the biological father to?

- (a) From your current relationship?
- (b) How many of these continue to live with you?

Q10. Please indicate in the boxes below, the ages of the children who form your family group:

Children from previous
relationships

Female: Male:

(b) Stepchildren

Female: Male:

(c) Children from this
relationship

Female: Male:

SECTION B

In this section I would like to ask you for your personal views
about your stepfamily life.

QII. Please indicate from the statements below the description
that you think most closely reflects the way you feel.

(a) I love my step children as if they were my own children:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(b) There is some conflict between my own children and my stepchildren:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(c) I have a good relationship with my stepchildren's biological father:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(d) I welcome the involvement of my stepchildren's biological father with his children:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(e) I think I will be in this stepfamily relationship in 5 years time:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(f) I think I will be in this stepfamily relationship in 10 years time:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(g) I feel that all, or most, of my income goes into the stepfamily household:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(h) Living in a stepfamily is a financial burden for me:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(i) I feel that maintenance payments I make for my children of previous relationships cause a strain on my relationship with my current partner/wife:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(j) My partner/wife resents the maintenance payments I make for my children of previous relationships:

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly Not

Agree Disagree applicable

(k) Overall my relationship with my current partner/wife would have been

better without my stepchildren in the household:

Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree				Disagree	applicable

(1) Since becoming a step father my relationship with my children who do not live with me has deteriorated:

Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree				Disagree	applicable

(m) In general the stepfamily relationship is long term commitment:

Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly
Agree				Disagree

(n) I would recommend other people to enter into a
stepfamily relationship:

Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly
Agree				Disagree

(o) Overall I am satisfied with my stepfamily life:

Very	Satisfied	Mixed	Dissatisfied	Very
Satisfied		Feelings		Dissatisfied

SECTION C

In this section I would like to ask you about the frequency of
some activities involving your stepchildren and children

Q12. Please indicate how often the following activities take place:

(a) I attend my stepchildren's school/college events:

Very regularly Regularly Not regularly Never Not
Applicable

(b) I discipline my stepchildren as I would my own:

Very regularly Regularly Not regularly Never Not
Applicable

(c) I see my children for previous relationships

Daily Weekly Monthly Only during Never Not
Holidays applicable

SECTION D

In this section I would like to ask you about the degree of
involvement with your stepchildren and children

Q13. How likely or unlikely is it for the following activities to take place:

instead to networks of relationships based on friendship, preference and commitment (Weeks et al., 2001). Weeks described these families of choice as 'elective families', which conveys the notion of 'created relationships' (Weeks, 2002: 219). Although these networks of relationships may or may not include blood relatives or children, they have a 'cultural and symbolic meaning for the people that participate or feel a sense of belonging in and through them' (Weeks, 2002: 218).

Morgan posits that the '...flux, fluidity and change' (Morgan, 1999: 15) taking place in families enables them to be regarded as dynamic, as opposed to the conventional perspective of the family as static. Morgan conceptualises this dynamism in family living as 'family practices', which he explains as follows:

The idea of practices ought to be able to take on board the understanding (the linkings of history and biography) as being part of the way in which family life is routinely understood without signing up to any one normative model of family living. For social actors, the importance of family life lies in the actual practices, practices which inevitably overlap with other areas of life and other practices, rather than any supposed unit or structure. Family practices exist in the routine talk about family - family obligations, family duties, family constraints, family burdens and so on - as much as in any particular piece of activity, and more than any definitive structure... The notion of practices attempts to capture a sense of family woven into the wider networks and practices of everyday life... (Morgan, 1999: 29).

Morgan suggests there are compelling reasons for adopting this perspective in seeking to further the understanding of families, which avoid the reifying potential of the term 'the family'. It promotes the notion that structural constraints are superseded by the diverse daily activities of those who regard themselves as members of families through which they can develop notions of their own identities. It suggests that change is a normative aspect of family living. Furthermore, it suggests that in the wider context of the concept of family,

(a) I make appointments for my
stepchildren at the doctor/dentist/hospital:

Very	Likely	Unlikely	Very	Never
Likely			Unlikely	

(b) I take my step children to appointments at
the doctor/dentist/hospital:

Very	Likely	Unlikely	Very	Never
Likely			Unlikely	

(c) I take and collect my stepchildren to and
from their various activities:

Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely
-------------	--------	----------

Very Unlikely	Never
---------------	-------

(d) My stepchildren and my
children get on well together :

Very	Likely	Unlikely	Very	Never	Not
Likely			Unlikely		Applicable

(e) My children from previous relationships visit me in my present home:

Very Likely Unlikely Very Never Not
Likely Unlikely Applicable

SECTION E

In this section I would like to ask you some questions about your
financial arrangements and responsibilities

Please indicate the response you feel to be the most appropriate *Note:*

the # = local currency

Q14. Do you pay for the support of your children from previous relationships?

Very regularly Regularly Not regularly Never Not
Applicable

Q15. How much do you pay in maintenance each week?

#Nil Less than #25 #26 - #50 #51 - #75
#76 - #100 More than #100 Not Applicable

Q16. Do you consider that the amount of maintenance you pay is:

Far too much Too much About right
Too little Far too little Not Applicable

Q17. Does your stepchildren's father make financial contributions for his children?

Very regularly Regularly Not regularly Never Not
Applicable

Q18. How much does your current partner/wife receive in maintenance payments per week,
for her children from previous relationships?

#Nil Less than #25 #26 - #50 #51 -75
#76 - #100 More than #100 Not Applicable

Q19. Would you say that the amount your current partner/wife receives is;

Far too much Too much About right Too little Far too little Not Applicable

SECTION F

This section provides the researcher with some important information about yourself

Q20. What is your age?

Q21. What is the age of your current partner/wife?

Q22. Which of the following most closely describes your current work
situation? (Tick more than 1 box if needed)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| (a) Retired | (b) Homemaker |
| (c) Full-time student | (d) Unemployed |
| (e) On benefit (sick/mobility allowance) | (f) Working full-time |
| (g) Working part-time | (h) Working in several part-time jobs |

Q23. If currently employed, how many hours, per week, do you tend to work
in your main job?

Q24. If you have additional jobs, per week, how many hours per week do you tend to work there?

Q25. Answer the following in detail

(a) What is the job title of your present main occupation, or, most recent occupation if currently unemployed?

(b) Please give the job titles for any additional jobs you do

Q26. What is your annual income before taxation? Note: the # = local currency

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) Under #5,000 | (b) #5,001 - #15,000 |
| (c) #15,001 - #25,000 | (d) #25,001 - #35,000 |
| (e) #35,001 - #45,000 | (f) Over #45,000 |

Q27. In addition to your annual income from employment, what other sources of income does current household receive? (Tick more than 1 box if needed)

- (a) Partner's/wife's employment (b) State Benefits
- (c) Unemployment Benefit (d) Stepchildren's father
- (e) Other (f) None

Q28. From the following list of ethnic groupings, select those which best describe the ethnic background/origin of yourself and your current partner/wife:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| (01) North American | (02) Central American | (03) South American |
| (04) Caribbean | (05) African | (06) Middle Eastern |
| (07) Indian | (08) Pakistani | (09) Bangladeshi |
| (10) Central Asian | (11) Chinese | (12) Japanese |

- (13) Australasian (14) Central European (15) East European
(16) South European (17) North European (inc U.K) (18) Irish
(19) Other

Insert the relevant numbers in the **boxes** below:

- (a) Yourself: (b) Your current partner/wife :

Q29. Please type any additional comments below:

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. If you would like any further information and/or a copy of the results of the 'Stepfather 2000' project, please contact Keith Burn

Stepfather 2000 Research Project Questionnaire designed by project leader Keith Burn, project consultant Michael Pollard and created by Niazv Kioufi at Web Creations

Appendix II: Ethical considerations for using electronic media in research

It was essential to reassure respondents using this method of electronic data transmission, that their identity would not be automatically disclosed. Although it is feasible to trace the sender of any electronic message, it would have meant undertaking a lengthy, and unnecessary process. A statement of confidentiality was given prominence on the first page of the questionnaire. It is possible to abuse this trust. Respondents could have their location recorded, address lists could be sold, or advertising targeted to particular groups. It was appropriate to adopt an ethical approach to the data gathering for this research, not only to assist with the success of the data gathering, but also to safeguard a research method that was in its early stages of development.

Part of the protection offered to respondents was that their responses would be recorded anonymously. The questionnaire was designed by the web designer so that these details, whilst automatically captured, were not displayed, and were not accessible to me as the recipient of the completed questionnaires. Therefore, unless the respondents chose to provide me with any of their personal details, to me, they were anonymous. However, respondents were invited to leave their details, at their discretion; many supplied this information. Some left a name only, others their e-mail address, their telephone number or a combination of these.

Anonymity of researchers, and deception, on the internet can lead to misleading information being provided about the research or the researcher. I included a photograph of myself on the introductory page of the questionnaire, by way of indicating who I was, in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender. I included several hyperlinks, through which potential respondents could verify the authenticity of the research. Each hyperlink had been requested from the organisations concerned and, at that time, they had to make the link to the questionnaire. The links included, The Thomas Coram Research unit website where I was listed as a research student, along with the title of my research project; the National Stepfamily Association (UK) website, where I was known to the Chief Executive; the web site author was also known to her; the Canadian Stepfamily Association, the Chief Executive of which had contacted me directly and requested a link to the web site.

As with the information gathered during the interviews, I have adhered to the terms of the Data Protection Act (1984).

The process of informed consent is complicated by the features of the internet as a research tool. I followed the guidance of several authors (Reid, 1996; Wasakul and Douglass, 1996; Childress and Asamen, 1998; Murray and Sixsmith, 1998) who indicated that there were three main issues to be addressed: relating the information to subjects; ensuring that subjects comprehend the information; and obtaining the voluntary agreement from subjects to participate. As a researcher, I was conscious of my ethical responsibility towards potential respondents. I sought to minimise the risks that they may perceive could be incurred through completing the questionnaire, for example, I set-up an email account which was

for the sole purpose of receiving these responses and I was the only person who had access to that account. Assurances of privacy were enhanced as the questionnaire was not part of a 'Newsgroup' or 'chat-room'; the responses were transmitted directly to me. The questions had been pre-piloted in a hard-copy format and were clear; responses were either by clicking electronic buttons or by writing text into expandable text-boxes. The website opened on the home-page where readers could establish whether they wished to participate or not. There was no pressure applied to potential respondents to participate, and clearly many chose not to, as the ratio of responses to visits was one-in-ten. No material rewards were offered for completing the questionnaire. The website was closed and removed from the internet once the data gathering was complete.

What was absent from the questionnaire was a button that could be selected by participants to indicate that they had read the information and they had given their consent to participate.

The internet was at a relatively early stage of growth at the time the questionnaire was available. As the growth in use of the internet has continued, the ethics of internet research have become of greater concern. Whilst I sought, at the time, to approach this aspect of the study in an ethical manner, I have indicated the major weakness in that I did not ask for confirmation from respondents that they understood the process and they then acknowledged that they had given their informed consent.

Appendix III: Examples of questionnaire qualitative responses

- One stepfather wrote about his circumstances in which he co-resided with a seven-year-old stepdaughter, and the non-resident father maintained contact with the child. He raised issues regarding the extent of his involvement with discipline, and personal care, his involvement vis-avis the involvement of the non-resident father, and highlighted responsibility as an aspect of his role:

My role has a number of complications and raises some contradictory feelings/emotions:

- (i) Whilst 'welcoming' the involvement of my partner's 'ex' and knowing that this is vital or important to my stepdaughter's development etc - his strong 'presence' means that there is a limit on my ability to take on a 'dad' role e.g. attending school functions.
- (ii) His involvement creates contradictions over approach on some issues and attitudes.
- (iii) It's small and sometimes 'petty' issues that create problems e.g. a sense of not being a 'free agent' to make decisions on some issues.
- (iv) Generally it is difficult to sometimes know where to come in on discipline issues. Not being the 'biological' father makes discipline issues feel much more heavy and potentially serious.
- (v) Physical displays of affection have some problem areas - especially around personal care issues - bathing for example. Most of the time however the situation works well. Taking on this role is a responsibility you do not take on lightly (#173).

- Another stepfather's example drew attention to the tension that he felt existed between the rewards of 'family life' and the complexities of stepfamily life. He also expresses his ambivalence towards the non-resident father, and his financial contribution compared to the non-resident father's lack of child support payments.

I have found the step parenting role to be difficult. I have found it to be a process. You never really get "there". Once you think everything is great the same old patterns erupts again. I am committed to my relationship but if I had to do it over I might think twice about step parenting. I kind of have a worst-case scenario with two little girls (aged 9 and 6) who love their father very much and a father who gives virtually no financial support. I think it would be easier to have him completely out of the picture or have a natural parent who contributed in a real and tangible way. One of the worst things about step parenting is it makes it difficult for you to have your own kids. At an age when I'm making more money

than I ever have before I find myself strapped because of the instant family dilemma. Right now I sound down on step parenting but it does have some rewards. Sometimes I have a lot of fun with the kids (#583).

- This stepfather referred to the challenges of stepfathers' roles in relation to the birth of a child, self-identity, and in relation to the non-resident father's role:

Basically I have two step daughters, 13 and 11 and a 10 month old son with my wife. I do very much favour my son to my daughters... Their father almost never pays for anything except to take them to Pizza, and then he does not take both of them. I spend more time, effort, and money on them than their father which helps some. Since I met them four years ago I have never tried to be, act or pretend I'm their dad. They've called me "my mum's new husband" and "Johnny", and sometimes "step dad", but usually "Johnny" (#616).

- In this last example, this stepfather drew attention to the ways in which care for children was the focus of the stepfather, children's mother and non-resident father, and the ways in which the stepfather made sacrifices to ensure that this was effective from his perspective:

My wife and her ex-husband currently share custody of their children equally and split the expenses accordingly (clothes, school etc.). The children are the most important aspect of our lives - myself, their mother, and their father do not EVER speak disrespectfully of another to the children. Making sure their relationship with each adult is based on their experience with them and never based on something that another says is key. By keeping a healthy relationship with their father helps keep tension down and allows the children to enjoy us all. However, as a stepfather, I make sure that the boys know that it is okay for them to favour their father over me without hurting my feelings. This has strengthened our relationship tremendously and surprisingly had allowed them to open up more since I was honest with them, and removed a potential problem area from their thoughts (#390).

Appendix IV: Interview schedule

1. Current Household

Brief introduction to why the interview is taking place /
anonymity/ informed consent/ happy to proceed.

I would first like to ask you why you have agreed to take part in
this interview?

I would like to begin the interview by getting a clear picture of
each person that makes up the household and then I would like
to ask you a bit about your own background.

Who are the members of the household?

Type of stepfamily

- A 1 no previous, no joint
- B 2 prev. not live, no joint
- C 3 prev some live, no joint
- D 4 prev not live, joint
- E 5 prev some live, joint
- F 6 no prev, joint

Names:

Dates of birth:

	child/gender/age					
	own child	M	M	M	F	F
	stepchild	M	M	M	F	F
	mutual child	M	M	M	F	F

Age of child/ren

2. Interviewee

other or new family members such as stepfathers may be engaged in making commitments and taking responsibilities through 'family obligations and family duties'. Thus, 'family practices' involves not merely the doing of certain activities in relation to specified others, but also the description of or the accounting for these activities in 'family' terms' (Morgan, 2002a: 154).

The relevance of these discourses for fathers and stepfathers in contemporary society is that gender and family roles become less narrowly defined, and may be reviewed and renegotiated as circumstances change. One of the implications for biological fathers of an increasing fluidity in relationship formation is that they are likely to spend less time co-resident with their own children (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001), and they, along with other men, are likely to spend an increasing amount of time co-residing with children to whom they are not biologically related (Smock, 2000). This has led to an increase in interest in men's involvement in families and stepfamilies.

1.7 Stepfamily research perspectives

Stepfamily research has been largely undertaken within two paradigms, and has mainly focused on the outcomes for children of the actions taken by adults with regard to their relationship formation and re-formation. The deficit-comparison paradigm has regarded the impact of adults' relationship choices on the children concerned, resulting in a number of potentially negative consequences for children and for successful stepfamily formation when compared to their counterparts in first-marriage families. However, research has been conducted within an alternative paradigm, referred to as the 'normative' or 'adaptive' perspective. This approach seeks to '...describe and understand the dynamics of step-relationships without a priori assumptions of negative outcomes' (Coleman and Ganong, 1990: 927). As the majority of stepfamilies are

Can you now tell me about yourself?

Personal background:

Where did you grow up?

What did your father do for a living?

Did you live with your birth parents?

Were your parents separated/divorced?

Divorced/never remarried Divorced/remarried Never
divorced

Widowed Never married

Any brothers/sisters?

What do you remember about your father when you were
growing up?

How did you get on with him as a child?

As a teenager?

Were there any things that you used to do together?

Regular /Occasional/ Rarely active /No activities together

Were you close?

Frequent/Occasional/Rarely displayed affection/No display of
affection

What is your present occupation?

Employment status

Working full time/part time/unemployed/retired

Number of hours worked per week

Any regular overtime?

On a regular working day how long are you out of the house?

Has the number of hours you spend working increased/decreased in recent years?

How often does your work involve being away overnight?

Gross income

Age at leaving full time education?

Highest qualification obtained?

GCSE /'A' Level/Degree/Postgraduate/None

What were your personal circumstances prior to this relationship?

Married/Single/Cohabiting/Divorced/Widowed

If in a relationship; how long were you together?

When did you break up?

What led to that relationship breaking up?

Who took the decision to leave?

What other relationships have you been involved with prior to the last one?

Number of significant relationships

Average length of relationships

How long have you been in the present relationship?

How long have you been in this household?

3. Current partner/wife's details

Does (name) work outside the home?

On an average working day, how many hours is she away from home?

How often does her work involve being away overnight?

Has she always worked?

Gross income

Can you tell me something about her background?

Father's occupation?

How well do you get on with your in-laws?

4. Current relationship details

Clarify current relationship with current partner (name) if necessary.

How do you describe your current relationship?

Married/cohabiting full time/cohabiting part time/single

How long have you been in this relationship?

If not married: how do you represent yourself to others e.g. doctor; school; neighbours; wider family?

Husband/Partner/Boyfriend /Children's father/other

How does your partner/wife indicate your relationship to her and to her children, to others outside the household?

Husband /Partner/Boyfriend/Children's father/ other

Before you moved in, did you have any view of how your relationship might develop with your partner/wife?

To what extent did you consider the fact that your current partner/wife had children?

Looking back, do you think the fact your partner had children is something you should have considered more carefully?

If so; what effect do you think the children have had on your relationship with your partner/wife?

How do you think your partner/wife considers your role in the household?

Is this your view of your role?

In what ways does this differ from the views you have about your role in the household?

5. Details of Children Living in the Household.

Confirm names/number of children living in the household and their ages?

Who are the birth parents of each of the children?

What surnames do each of the children use?

What do each of the children call you:

at home

outside the home

Do you feel particularly strongly about what the children call you ?

How well do you feel you get on with your own children?

How well do you feel you get on with your partner's children?

How well do you feel you get on with your mutual children?

Can you describe the relationship you have with:

Your own child(ren)

Your partner's child(ren)

Your mutual child(ren)

In what ways do you think your relationship differs between the children?

How do you refer to the children to others outside the home?(doctor/school/neighbours/your wider family)

Do you find instances when it is problematic trying to explain who you are in relation to the children/child concerned?

How do you deal with this?

Do you feel particularly strongly about the issue of names and what each child may call themselves?

Does the issue of names cause any tension within the household?

Do you/have you discuss(ed) this issue with your partner/wife?

Do you or your current partner have any children who live outside the household?

Interviewee	Yes	No
Partner/wife	Yes	No

6. Children NOT living in the household

(Your children)

What are their names and their ages?

Who are their birth parents ?

Where are they living and with whom?

Do they ever visit the household?

Do they write or telephone

If you never see them do you telephone/write

How would you describe the relationship you have with her/him?

(Your Partner/wife's children)

Do they ever visit the household?

Do they write or telephone

If you never see them does your partner telephone/write

How would you describe the relationship you have with your partner's children?

What effect do these visits have on:

your partner/wife's children

your children

your mutual children

Do you see your children less frequently than previously?

How do you feel about this?

Would you like to spend more time with them?

Do you think they would like to spend more time with you?

What do you think prevents you spending more time with them?

What have you tried to do about this?

Do you encourage them to see you more?

What are the contact arrangements with them?

Formal /informal

If/when they visit you here (home) do they ever stay over?

How would you describe the role you play in these children's lives?

What role should you have?

How do you feel your role with your own children has changed?

Are they likely to confide in you?

If so, what sort of things will they discuss with you?

How do you show your affection for them?

Would you say you ;

do things for them / do things with them / both.

What contributions do you make for other children living elsewhere? If any, how regular are they?

How do you feel about these payments?

If you don't contribute; should you?

7. Your relationship with children in the household

Which of the children are most likely to/least likely to confide in you if they have a problem to discuss?

Why might this be the case?

Which issues would the different children tend to discuss with you?

Which issues might you be hesitant about broaching with the children, even if they raise them?

Which issues cause the most tension between you and the children?

What aspects of the child(ren)'s behaviour annoys you most?

What sorts of things do you and the children do together?

at home

outside the home

Should you do more?

What prevents you?

Does your wife/partner (name) think you should do more?

What physical contact do you have with the children?

What don't you do with your partner/wife's children?

How do you think your partner/wife's child(ren) consider your role in the household with regard to them?

Have you discussed this with them?

Do you think this has changed with time?

What changes do you think have taken place in your relationship with your partner/wife's children since you have been living with them?

Can you say why this might be?

What would you change about your/your partner/wife's children?

8. History of current partner/wife's previous relationship

Can you give me some details about your current partner's child(ren)'s father?

Were they previously married / cohabiting / not married

Do you know how long the relationship/marriage lasted?

Did your current partner/wife have a period of living alone?

How long?

How much contact does your partner/wife's children have with their father?

Do they:

visit here meet elsewhere only telephone only write

Do you encourage the children to see their father?

Do the children confide in him?

Do the children have physical contact with their father?

What role does he have in his children's lives?

What role should he have?

What do you feel about the role he plays in the children's lives?

How do you feel about his involvement (lack of it) with the child(ren)?

In what ways has his level of involvement changed since he left?

In what way(s) would you say your relationship with the children (names) differs from his?

stepfather families, the research findings from these different perspectives have been influential in forming opinions of the role of stepfathers, the effects stepfathers may have on stepchildren in terms of child outcomes, and the challenges that are faced by stepfathers in different stepfamily settings. This section will review the strengths and limitations of selected research conducted within each of these two paradigms, and will identify the implications of these findings for stepfathers in stepfamilies.

1.7.1 The 'deficit' model

Research interest in divorce and remarriage and the impact of marital transitions on children has grown as the incidence of divorce and remarriage has increased. Early research on the implications of divorce and remarriage focused on child development issues, and was largely based on clinical studies (see for example the work of Visser and Visser, 1979; 1983; 1988; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). This gave rise to a body of knowledge, which became known as the 'deficit' model. This model has been used widely to compare the outcomes of children from a variety of families such as lone parents, never married, and step-parents with children from first-marriage families (Ganong and Coleman, 1994).

Differences in outcomes were identified that generally indicated that children who experienced marital or family transitions would do less well across a range of measures when compared to their counterparts from first-marriage families (Glenn and Cramer, 1985). Children from divorced families were more likely to express behavioural, emotional and health problems (Dawson, 1991; Bray et al., 1992). They were also found to perform less well at school (Fogelman, 1983; Elliot and Richards, 1991) and to have a higher level of school absenteeism. Children from divorced and remarried families were more likely to run away from

Is he involved in a new relationship?

married cohabiting none not known

Does he have any additional children?

What implications, if any, does this have for the family?

Do(es) the child(ren)'s father regularly contribute financially?

Is it voluntary?

Are there any lapses; periods of absence?

Recap on family constellation and draw diagram

9. Parenting rules and routines

Who has the main say in deciding/negotiating what the main household rules/routines will be for the children?

TV

Bedtime

Time to come home

Household duties

Homework

Other

Do these rules/routines lead to any conflict within the household?

Do you think these issues are a cause of tension between you and the child(ren)?

How important is it for you to do things together as a family?
e.g. eat together/go for walks/visits/sports activities

To what extent are you involved with discipline of the children?
discussion/agreement/practice

Do you feel this is enough or would you prefer a greater involvement?

Does your partner/wife (name) agree with you about your level of involvement with discipline?

Are there times when you feel that you have to be particularly careful what you say about the children to your partner/wife?

If yes; when might this be?

What changes have you made or attempted to make to the household?

What has the outcome been?

10. Details about this current house

Rented/mortgaged?

In whose name?

Did either you or your current partner live here previously?

Number of bedrooms?

Who sleeps where?

Who has responsibility to provide the money for the following bills:

Rent/mortgage

Utilities/gas/electric/water/telephone/insurances

Food

Children's clothes/needs

Household repairs

Leisure

Who is the main decision maker over particular types of expenditure?

Are there conflicts that arise over who pays for what?

Over your share of the payments?

Does money get spent as you would wish?

Do you think of yourself as being a provider for the household / for the children?

Do you consider your partner/wife a provider?

Is there any differential provision between the children?

Do you feel that the household is financially better off since you began living here / involved with the family?

Do you and your partner share the domestic chores?
partner/wife responsibility partner/wife greater share

Has this changed as you have lived together?

If so, why did it change?

11. Child Care

Who accompanies the children to their school activities/
parents evenings/playgroup?

Who went on the last occasion?

Who generally takes and fetches the children from their out of
school activities?

Who generally makes appointments for the children at the
doctor/dentist?

Who made the last appointment?

Who took the children there on the last occasion?

Who generally stays home if any of the children are unwell?

Who stayed home the last time?

How involved do you feel you are with the family, with regard to
practical issues?

Are there any aspects you would like to have a greater
involvement?

Overall, how involved are you with issues affecting your
children?

Overall, how involved are you with issues affecting your your
partner/wife's children?

To what extent do you consider yourself to be/not to be a father
to these children?

12. Further children for you and your current partner

(Actual)

Was the birth of you and your current partner's child(ren) planned?

To what extent did you involve your partner/wife's children?

How would you describe the effect this birth had on your relationship:

with your partner

with her children

with your children (in the household)

with children living elsewhere

Has this changed any over time?

Are you aware of any differences in your relationship towards the child(ren) you have had with your current partner and your partner/wife's child(ren)?

Do you think that your partner/wife's children are aware of these differences?

How do you deal with this?

(Prospective)

Have you considered having a child with your current partner?

How does your partner feel about this?

Have you involved her /your children in this ?

How do you think having a child might affect your relationship with:

your partner/wife

her children

your children(in the household)

children living elsewhere?

Why are you keen/not keen to have another child?

13. Additional Information

Do you think that absent fathers should contribute towards their children?

Do you think they should be made to contribute?

Do you think that making financial contributions absolves the father from doing other things with or for his children?

Have you considered marriage?(if not married)

Have you considered adoption?

What does it mean to you to be a stepfather?

Why do you (not) see yourself as a stepfather?

In what ways would you say the role of a stepfather differs from that of a father?

What makes it work for you?

What do you think of your future in the short term

with your partner?

with the children?

in the long term:

with your partner?

with the children?

What aspects of fathering do you feel you are excluded from as a stepfather?

Would you spend a couple of minutes now reflecting on our discussion.

Is there anything that you would like to add or that you think I may have missed out?

Are there any particular issues that we have raised that you may not have discussed previously?

Is there anything that we have talked about that you are unclear about or would like explained (to explain) further?

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Are you satisfied with the answers you have given to these questions?

Is there anything that you feel you would like to change?

Thank you for participating in the interview – go to DAS

Appendix V: Dyadic satisfaction scale

The following is a list of 10 statements. Please indicate on the scale, by circling the *ONE* number, which when all things considered, most closely reflects the present situation within your relationship.

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
2. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
3. In general, how often do you think that things between yourself and your partner are going well?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
4. Do you confide in your partner?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
5. Do you ever regret that you lived together / married?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
6. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
7. How often do you and your partner get on each other's nerves?	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
8. Do you kiss your partner?	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>

9. The following scale represents different degrees of happiness in relationships. The middle point "happy", represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the one that best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

10. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- 5 I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.
4 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.
3 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.
2 It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I'm doing now* to help it succeed.
1 It would be nice if it succeeded, but *I refuse to do any more than I'm doing now* to keep the relationship going.
0 My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more than I can do* to keep the relationship going.

Appendix VI: Letter to newspaper editors and press release

The Editor
Tunbridge Wells Courier
Longfield Road
Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN2 3HL

Dear Sir

I would be very grateful if you could insert this small article, possibly in your letters page. As the text indicates, I am a Ph.D. research student at the University of London and I am seeking a sample of interested men to enable me to complete the project.

Family Research

As part of a research project about men and relationships, based at the University of London, I am interested in hearing from men who are currently in relationships with, or married to, women who already have children. If this describes your situation, I would like to hear from you with a view to broadening our understanding of an increasingly important family structure.

You can contact me by telephone on 0956 537003, or by writing to me at:
Thomas Coram Research Unit, 28 Woburn Square, London, WC1H 0AA.

Thank you in advance

Keith Burn

home, to be apprehended for a criminal offence, to start working straight from school (Kiernan, 1992a), to leave home earlier (White and Booth, 1985; Aquilino, 1991; Kiernan, 1992b), and to become sexually active and to marry at a younger age (Booth and Edwards, 1990). Subsequently they were more likely to get divorced themselves and to suffer more ill health (Zill and Schoenborn, 1990). Children who experienced family transitions were also more likely to be over-represented amongst users of mental health services, experience higher rates of depression and anxiety (Emery, 1982; Burgoyne et al., 1987; Barber and Lyons, 1994), to have higher rates of substance use (Flewelling and Bauman, 1990), and to experience more abuse than their counterparts from first-marriage families (Booth et al., 1984; Ferri, 1984; Zill, 1988; 1994). Children who had experienced a series of these events were found to be more likely to form adult partnerships with others who had similar experiences (Dunn et al., 2000).

1.7.2 Evolutionary theory

Evolutionary theorists, for example Belsky et al., (1991), Badcock (1994), Daly and Wilson (1994), have sought to explain some of these differences in stepchildren's outcomes in terms of increased stress, conflict, or maltreatment, resulting from a reduced level of 'parental investment' (Trivers, 1972) in stepfamilies. Trivers originally defined 'parental investment' as:

Any investment by the parent in an individual offspring that increases the offspring's chances of surviving [and hence reproducing]⁵ at the cost of the parent's ability to invest in other offspring (Trivers, 1972: 139).

This perspective posits that men (and women) will be less inclined to invest in someone else's children, as the cost of doing so will be the investment forgone

⁵ The use of square brackets denotes text that I have inserted for the purpose of clarity.

Appendix VII: Publications that carried press release

Local Press:

Sutton Herald
Reigate Independent
Surrey Mirror
Croydon Advertiser
Croydon Guardian
East Grinstead Gazette
Tunbridge Wells Courier

Other publications used:

Parents News
Time Out
The Big Issue
Taxi Globe
Gate Lodge
This Week
Croydon College Staff Bulletin

MEN ONLY!

Are you currently in a relationship of 1 year or more, with a woman who already has children?

If this describes you, then I would like to hear from you to take part in a research project about men, their relationships and the families they live with.

This would be in the form of a brief interview.

If you would like to take part in this research project, or to find out more about it, you can write to me at:

Keith Burn
The Thomas Coram Research Unit
27 Woburn Square
London
WC1H 0AA

Or telephone me direct on 0956 537003

Appendix IX: Contact summary sheet for Henry

Henry aged 43, married to Elizabeth aged 43 who had two sons aged 18 and 16 and a daughter aged 12. Married for 10 years and had two sons born since then, aged 8 and 6. Henry worked full-time as a Social Worker, Elizabeth was employed part-time. Henry works away from home occasionally and some evenings, but he balances this with sufficient time off to compensate and 'maintain my commitments to my family.' He described his childhood experiences with his own father as being 'close' with lots of visits to places of interest and shared activities, although his father was not physically demonstrative.

Elizabeth and her three children moved into Henry's house twelve years ago following a threatening situation with her ex-husband. Henry had met Elizabeth previously at a party and had given her a key for his house should she encounter some threats of violence. One night he received a call from Elizabeth and she and her children moved in.

There are four surnames used in the household: Henry used his surname, Elizabeth used her maiden name, her children used a double-barrelled surname combining their mother and father's surnames, and Henry and Elizabeth's children also used a double-barrelled surname combining Henry and Elizabeth's surnames. The house remains in Henry's name although he noted that in his will it is clearly stipulated that the house will pass to Elizabeth in the event of his untimely death.

Henry explained that he had given a great deal of consideration to the needs of his stepchildren. He said he had to respect their wishes and their needs. Henry pays for the mortgage; all the rest of the household expenses are shared.

Henry has always been involved in discipline and control and this has led to conflicts between him and his stepsons during the past 4 years. Elizabeth has continued to support him throughout. He has not experienced the same conflicts with his stepdaughter, although she is 12.

Initially Henry said that he resented the children's non-resident father and wished that he was dead, however, having met him, Henry says he understands the place he has in the children's lives and supports the contact to continue for as long as the children wish it to.

Henry has been completely involved in all aspects of childcare from the outset, changing nappies, bathing, making appointments, taking children to appointments, and caring for children when they are sick. He explained that as he was self-employed, he could shift his work commitments to suit the family's needs. However, if Elizabeth was not at work, she would equally be involved.

Henry felt the birth of his children had 'cemented' the family. He said that rather than feel like a father or a stepfather, he feels part of a group that is called a family.

The future: Henry talked about the children growing up and doing well or not well as circumstances would develop. He could not identify how this would differ between fathers and stepfathers 'who want the best for their kids.'

Table – I: Stepfathers with 'low' involvement in stepchildren's activities

Low involvement		Indoor activities						Outdoor activities									Involvement score (1+2)	
		in-door game	watch TV	talk	eat	educational activity	child care	Sub total (1)	Med. appointments	play sports	watch sports	cinema	restaurant	taxi	school events	other		Sub total (2)
Possible scores		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	7	✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	12	19
Name	Yschil age/ gender																	
Matt	9f				✓			1									0	1
Darren	6f	✓						1								✓	1	2
Shahid	18m		✓	✓				2					✓				1	3
Hassa	18f				✓			1						✓		✓	2	3
Allan	13m	✓			✓			2						✓		✓	2	4
Bernar	18m			✓	✓			2			✓		✓			✓	3	5
Jack	4f		✓	✓		✓		3							✓	✓	2	5
Bill	8f			✓	✓	✓		3						✓		✓	2	5
Vince	18m			✓	✓			2						✓	✓	✓	3	5

Key: ✓ = involvement with a stated activity

Table – II: Stepfathers with ‘moderate’ involvement in stepchildren’s activities

Moderate involvement		Indoor activities							Outdoor activities									Involve ment score
Possible score		in- door game ✓	watch TV ✓	Tal k ✓	Eat ✓	Educati onal activitie ✓ ✓	child care ✓	Sub total (1)	Med. appoi ntmen ✓	play sports ✓ ✓	watch sports ✓	cine ma ✓	rest' ant ✓	Taxi ✓ ✓	school events ✓ ✓	Other ✓ ✓	Sub total (2)	
Nam e	Yschild age/ gender																	
Gilb	11m	✓			✓			2			✓			✓	✓ ✓	✓	5	7
Gary	7f	✓		✓		✓	✓	4			✓		✓			✓	3	7
Gord	7f		✓	✓		✓		3						✓	✓ ✓	✓	4	7
Alf	10m			✓	✓	✓	✓	4						✓	✓	✓	3	7
Andr	6m		✓	✓		✓	✓	4			✓		✓		✓	✓	4	8
Fran	7m,	✓		✓	✓		✓	4	✓					✓	✓	✓	4	8
Jaso	18m			✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓				✓	✓	✓		4	8

Moderate involvement (Table II cont.)		Indoor activities							Outdoor activities									Involve ment score (1+2)
Possible score		in- door game	watch tv	talk	Eat	educa tional activit	child care	Sub total (1)	Med. appoi ntmen	play sports	watch sports	cinem a	rest'a nt	taxi	school events	Other	Sub total (2)	
Name	Yschild age/ gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓		✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓		
Louis	9f			✓	✓	✓		3		✓		✓		✓	✓ ✓	✓	6	9
Derek	14m		✓	✓	✓	✓		4			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5	9
Sincla	14f				✓	✓	✓	3		✓ ✓		✓	✓			✓ ✓	6	9
Willia	3f	✓	✓	✓		✓		4						✓	✓	✓	3	7
Ben	50m	✓			✓	✓		3	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		5	8
Chris	8f		✓	✓	✓	✓		4			✓		✓		✓	✓	4	8

Key: ✓ = involvement with a stated activity

Table – II: Stepfathers with ‘moderate’ involvement in stepchildren’s activities (cont.)

Moderate involvement (cont.)		Indoor activities							Outdoor activities								Involve ment score (1+2)	
Possible score		in- door game	watch TV	talk	eat	educa tional activit	child care	Sub total (1)	Med. appoi ntmen	play sports	watch sports	cinem a	rest'a nt	taxi	school events	Other		Sub total (2)
Name	Yschild age/ gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓		✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓		
Fred	15m	✓	✓	✓	✓			4		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		5	9
Jimmy	10f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5		✓	✓			✓		✓	4	9
Arnold	14f			✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	6	10
Harold	10f		✓	✓	✓		✓	4			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	10
Russ	9m	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6	11

Key: ✓ = involvement with a stated activity

Table – III: Stepfathers with ‘high’ involvement in stepchildren’s activities

High involvement		Indoor activities							Outdoor activities									Involve ment score (1+2)
Possible scores		in- door game	watch TV	Tal	Eat	educa tional activit ✓ ✓	child care ✓	Sub total (1)	Med. appoi ntmen	play sports ✓ ✓	watch sports ✓	cinem a ✓	rest’a nt ✓	taxi ✓ ✓	school events ✓ ✓	other ✓ ✓	Sub total (2)	
Name	Yschild age/ gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓			✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓		
Rhyss	10f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓		6			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	7	13
Ron	4m	✓	✓	✓		✓ ✓		5		✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓ ✓	8	13
Daniel	13f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	8	14
Barry	5f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	7		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	8	15
Tom	6f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	7		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓ ✓	9	15
Henry	12f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	7	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	9	16
Jerry	5f	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓		6		✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	10	16
Terry	6m	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	7		✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓	10	17

Key: ✓ = involvement with a stated activity

Table – IV: Summary of involvement scores for all activities

Category	Indoor activities						Total indoor score (1)	Mean indoor score	Outdoor activities								Total outdoor score (2)	Mean outdoor score	Total score (1) + (2)	Mean scores (1) + (2)
	in-door game	watch TV	talk	eat	educational activities	child care			med appointments	play sports	watch sports	Cinema	restaurant	taxi	school events	other				
Low n=9	2	2	5	6	2	-	17	1.8 (sd 0.8)	-	-	1	-	2	4	2	7	16	1.7 (sd 1.0)	33	3.6 sd 1.5
Mode rate n=18	8	9	15	14	14	8	68	3.8 (sd 0.7)	4	7	10	6	10	11	17	17	82	4.5 (sd 1.0)	151	8.3 sd 1.1
High n=8	8	8	8	7	14	5	50	6.4 (sd 0.7)	1	9	7	7	8	9	13	15	69	8.7 (sd 1.2)	119	15.1 sd 1.7
Total n=35	18	19	28	27	30	13	135	3.8 (sd 1.7)	5	16	18	13	20	24	32	39	167	4.8 (sd 2.7)	303	8.6 sd 4.3

(Correlation between indoor and outdoor scores significant at r_s 0.78, $p < .01$)

Appendix XII: Examining relationships between variables

Stepfathers' future plans			
Stepfather	Couple/Family/Exit focus	Additional/ Further/No kids	Plans/wishes for future
Shahid	E	N	Leave/drawn to past kids
Hassan	E	N	Important kids have a mum and dad, that's all/ drawn to subs kids/leave
Chris	E	N	No such thing as permanent/moving house, keeping own flat
Matt	E	N	Don't think about it; take each day as it comes
Allan	E	N	No thoughts on a future
Gary	C	N	Co-res, marriage (not partner's wish)
Gilbert	C	N	Kids leave, marriage, together til death
Bernard	C	N	'Terry and June.' I think this is it until one or other of us goes (dies). There isn't pressure to get married so we will probably carry on as we are.
Fred	C	N	Marriage
Derek	C	F	Adoption of other children/ care for kids til they leave home
Darren	C	A	Stay together til we retire
Vince	C	A	Kids leave
Sinclair	C	N	Together til death
Ben	C	N	1 day at a time
Harold	C	N	Marriage, kids gone in 6 years
Gordon	F/C	A	Happy as parents but will enjoy more time alone when kids leave
Alf	F	N	'be there' for kids / marriage
Terry	F	F	Child
Russ	F	N	Kids got 2 parents and stable home life, strong relationship
Frank	F	N	Full time 'dad' now

in one's own children. This gives rise to the suggestion that reproductive and parenting strategies are directed towards securing the most favourable outcomes for their own biological children rather than towards the children of others (Dawkins, 1986; Belsky et al., 1991; Badcock, 1994; Daly and Wilson, 1994; Case et al., 2000).

Earlier research suggested that stepfathers were a threat to the physical well being of stepchildren (Russell, 1984; Daly and Wilson, 1985), and to the mothers of these children (Daly et al., 1993). Other studies found that mothers' boyfriends were over-represented in reports of child abuse (Finkelhor, 1984; Margolin, 1992). Kendall-Tackett and Jerry (1987) found from their interviews of a clinical sample that the majority of perpetrators of abuse were biological fathers (39%), and stepfathers (20%). Whilst these studies were conducted when stepfamilies were less prevalent than they are now, and cautionary notes have been suggested by their authors (see Finkelhor, 1984), they have led evolutionary theorists to claim that 'social fathering' cannot be the same as biological fathering (Daly and Wilson, 1994). However, a recent study of children born as a result of donor-insemination found a genetic link between father and child was less important for the 'development of a positive [father-child] relationship' than a 'strong desire for parenthood' (Golombok et al., 2002: 965).

1.7.3 Contextualising the deficit model

Many of the studies conducted within the deficit perspective have identified differences in outcomes between children who experienced family transition and children of first-marriage families. However, when other factors that may have contributed to the outcomes were considered, the differences were frequently small and not always significant (Amato, 1994; Dunn et al., 1998; Nicholson et al., 1999). The origins of many of the outcomes associated with family

Bill	F	N	Happy with partner & kids
Jason	F	N	Going to become grandparents
Jimmy	F	A	Carry me out of here in a box / marriage
Jack	F	N	Relations with stepchild get better & better
Tom	F	F	Child on way, work less home more
William	F	A	Work less, home more
Ron	F	F	Committed to Marianne & O.. til I die
Barry	F	F	Child on way, whole group of us are very strong & happy
Jerry	F	A	My objectives for the children, all of them, this is a nice house, but I want to do better than that. I want them all to have their own room their privacy and space, They can have a garden to run around in if they want to. When they bring boyfriends and girlfriend back they will be impressing them and they will never be ashamed of where they live
Louis	F	F	Try for a child, move to new house. We've got each other, we've got the children and we do appreciate what we've got and we're fairly positive
Henry	F	A	Kids do well or not well, be there regardless for them
Daniel	F	A	Stable home for kids
Andrew	F	F	Tried for child/marriage planned
Arnold	F	N	Support children to grow
Rhyss	F	A	Support kids to grow

Table V: Classification of stepfathers

	Involve score	Yrs co-res	Previous Married/ Cohabit/ Single	Married/ Cohabit	Own child previous/ subsequent/ NA	Partner hours work	Partner gross Income '000	SF hours work	SF Gross Income '000	NRF In contact	DAS score
Mum's Boyfriends (n=9)											
Jack	5	1	S	C	NA	15	8	40	22	Y	44
Bernard	5	3	M	C	NA	40	18	60	22	N	41
Allan	4	2	C	C	P	NA	8**	45	22	N	30
Bill	5	1	M	C	NA	35	7	40	17	Y	39
Matt	1	2	S	C	NA	NA	8**	NA	7**	Y	30
Chris	8	1	C	C	NA	40	34	35	25	Y	36
Andrew	8	3	C	C	NA	55	18	40	16	Y	35
Alf	7	1	C	C	NA	14	10	37	34	Y	35
Ben	8	2	M	C	P	50	50	55	30	Y	36

[illegible]

	Involve score	Yrs co-res	Previous Married/ Cohabit/ Single	Married/ Cohabit	Own child Previous/ Subsequent/ NA	Partner hours work	Partner gross Income '000	SF hours work	SF Gross Income '000	NRF In contact	DAS score
Co-operative caretakers (n=9)											
Daniel	14	6	S	M	S	32	12	40	20	Y	39
Russ	11	2	MW*	M	P	NA	NA	35	40	Y	38
Arnold	10	7	MW	M	P	20	6	45	40	N	39
Tom	15	2	S	M	S	30	10	45	120	Y	46
Jerry	16	1	M	M	S	15	10	45	45	Y	40
Henry	16	9	M	M	S	25	10	40	25	Y	47
Barry	15	1	S	C	S	30	20	55	39	Y	43
Ron	13	2	S	C	NA	36	25	40	25	Y	45
Terry	17	1	S	M	NA	35	16	40	30	Y	48








Note: *MW = married / widowed

** Benefits

Appendix XIV: Biographies of participants

The following diagrams indicate the present structure of the stepfamily networks of the men who have taken part in the interviews and are presented in order to provide the reader with a 'snapshot' of each of the participants. Each diagram is followed by a brief summary of a number of key features that relate to each of the stepfather and their relationships with the main actors involved in each family constellation. The closest and most significant members have been included, as have the names of the adults where known (all changed to protect their identities). Where all the information was obtained these have been summarised in terms of; stepfathers' age, relationship with own father when growing up, activities with own father and level of affection displayed. Stepfathers' previous relationship details are included where known such as, total number of relationships, length of time with current partner, current partner's previous relationship history, number of years she spent living alone prior to this present relationship. Stepfathers' employment and income details, and their partner's income are also included. Stepfathers- stepchild relations, the terminology used to describe stepchildren and the terminology used by the stepchildren to refer to stepfathers, stepfathers' contact with non-resident fathers and stepfathers' plans for the future. The stepfamily snapshots have been presented by their final classification as; 'Mum's boyfriends', 'Traditionalists', and 'Co-operative caretakers'.

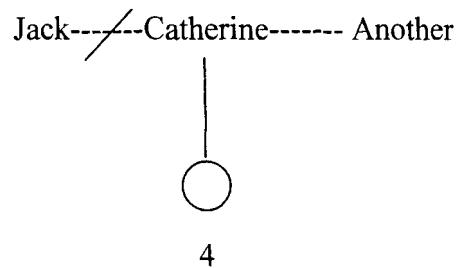
Key to Symbols:

	= male child
	= female child
	= married
	= cohabiting
	= divorced
	= no longer cohabiting
	= deceased

Children's ages have been added as numbers below each child symbol where the child is still involved with the stepfamily.

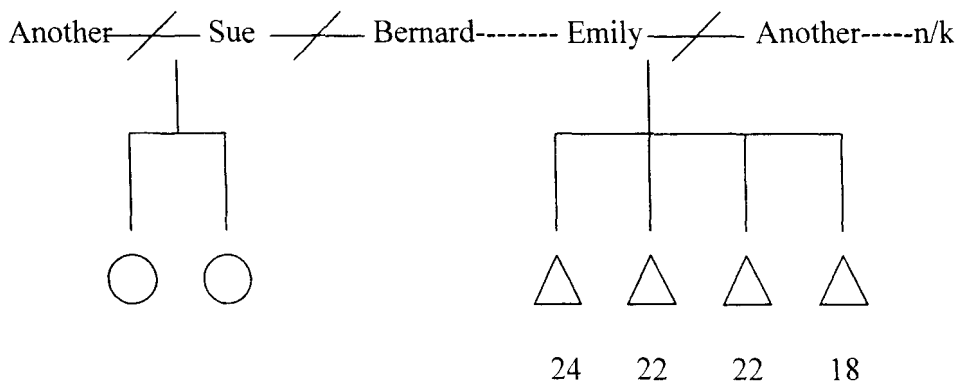
Mum's boyfriends

Jack



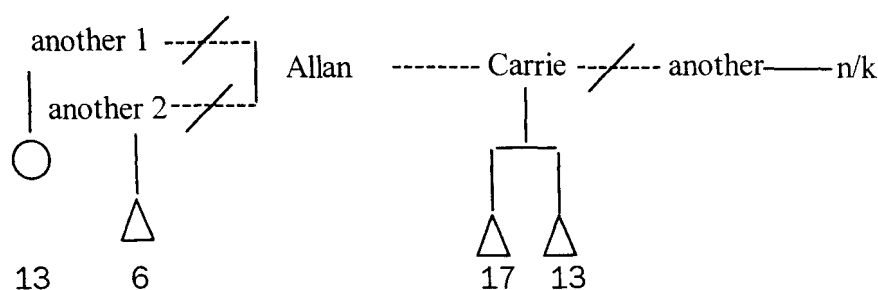
Jack is 31 years old and got on reasonably well with his own father, there were occasional activities together but no display of affection. He was single prior to this relationship and has had two other significant relationships (total relationships: three). Jack has been in this relationship for eighteen months and cohabiting for one year. Catherine was previously cohabiting with her child's father for two years and then spent about six months living alone. Jack works as an administrator for a co-operative where he has recently become a director and earns £22,000, Catherine works as a freelance translator and earns about £8,000. Jack refers to the child as my partner's child and she refers to him by his first name. The non-resident father lives nearby and sees the child weekly; Jack acknowledges his involvement. Plans for the future are reported as 'continuing to be good'.

Bernard



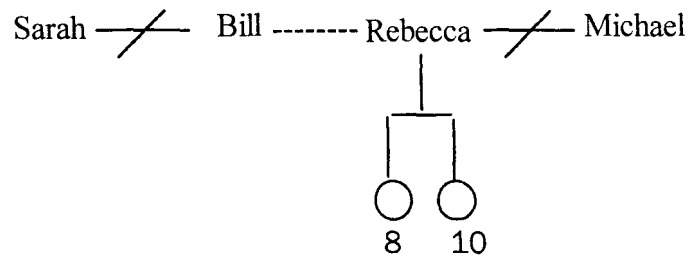
Bernard is 42 years old and did not get on at all well with his father, they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection. He was previously married for eight months of a three-year relationship and had two stepdaughters. Following his divorce from Sue, he was in a cohabiting relationship with Emily for four years. Bernard and Emily separated and she was subsequently married (second marriage) for eight years. Emily divorced her second husband and Bernard began a relationship with her for a second time three years ago and has been cohabiting for two years; Emily has not spent any time living alone. Bernard works as a West End theatre manager earning £22,000, Emily works full time as a nurse and earns £22,000. Bernard refers to the children as his partner's children and they refer to him by his first name. The children never see their non-resident father, nor their non-resident stepfather, although Bernard would welcome the involvement of the father. Plans for the future; 'Terry and June'.

Allan



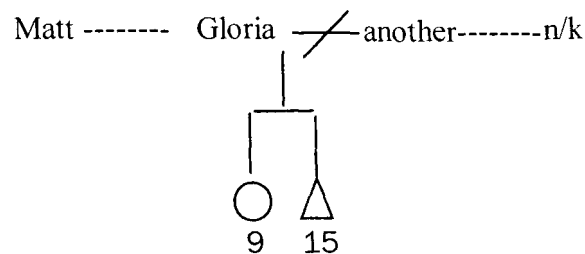
Allan is 40 years old and did not get on well with his father, they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection. He was single prior to his current relationship but has had three previous significant relationships, all cohabiting. Allan has been cohabiting for two years of a three-year relationship with Carrie. Carrie was cohabiting with her children's father for five years and they split up before the birth of the second child, she was involved in another relationship before meeting Allan and did not spend time living alone. Allan is an electrician earning £22,000 and Carrie is on benefits. Allan refers to his stepchildren as his partner's children and they refer to him by his first name. The non-resident father has no contact with the children although he continues to live in the area. Allan continues to see his own two children from two previous relationships on a weekly basis. Allan does not think about the future.

Bill



Bill is 37 years old and got on exceptionally well with his father, they were occasionally active together and there were frequent displays of affection. His previous relationship lasted fourteen years of which he was married for five years followed by six months living alone. (total relationships: two). This current relationship has lasted for two years and they have been cohabiting for one year. Rebecca was previously married for ten years and did not live alone following her separation. Bill works as an IT trainer in a university earning £17,000 and Rebecca works part time earning £7,000. Bill refers to the children as his partner's children and they refer to him by his first name. Bill welcomes the involvement of the non-resident father, who continues to live locally. There is a shared parenting agreement; the children spend one week in two with their father. Plans for the future; 'we take it week by week'.

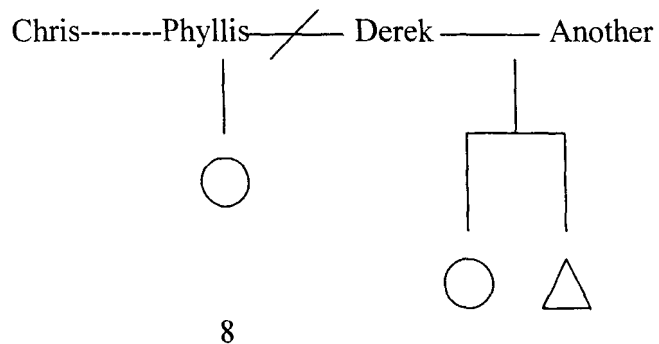
Matt



Matt is 47, he got on reasonably well with his father although they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection. He has been in two previous significant relationships (total relationships: three). He has been in this current relationship for eight years and has been cohabiting for two years. Gloria was previously married for eight years and did not spend any time living alone. Matt is currently unemployed and in receipt of benefits, Gloria does not work although she does sell cosmetics on a 'party plan' basis and is on benefits. Matt

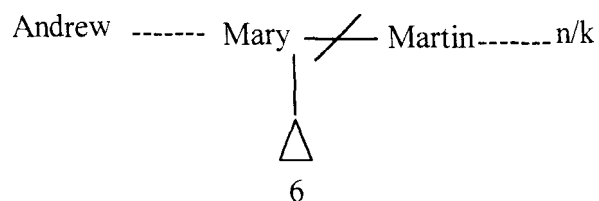
refers to the children by name and they refer to Matt as an uncle at home and by his first name out of the home. For the last three years the children's father has not made contact with them; Matt acknowledges he should be involved. The future is to 'take each day as it comes'.

Chris



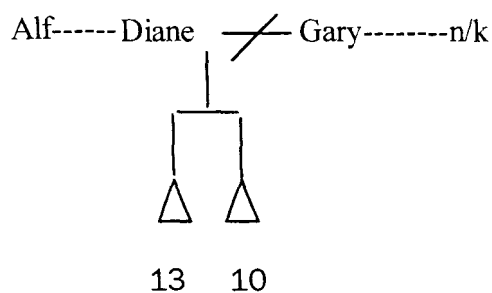
Chris is aged 43, he had a mixed relationship with his father, there were occasional activities together, his father was often present at home, for short periods, but little display of affection. Chris had two previous cohabiting relationships, one lasting for twelve years. Chris has cohabited with Phyllis for one year of a five-year relationship and currently shares Phyllis' home. Phyllis was previously married for eight years; she did not spend any time living alone. Chris gets on well with Phyllis' daughter; he often baby-sits and they are involved in a number of indoor and outdoor activities. The non-resident father is regularly involved and regularly contributes financially. Chris is working full time and earns £25,000; Phyllis works full time and earns £34,000. They plan to move home in the near future. The new home will continue to be in Phyllis's and her daughter's names only.

Andrew



Andrew is aged 27, he got on reasonably well with his father, although he was a disciplinarian, there were few activities together and little display of affection. Both Andrew's parents continue to live together. Andrew has been involved in three previous cohabiting relationships, prior to meeting Mary four years ago. They have cohabited for three and a half years and share Mary's previous home. Mary was previously married for four years followed by one and a half years living alone. Andrew works full time in retail and earns £16,000 while Mary who also works full time earns £18,000. Andrew has little contact with the non-resident father, although he would like to develop this relationship, if possible in the future. The non-resident father has regular contact with his son, and makes regular, small, financial contributions. Andrew gets along reasonably well with Mary's son, although there is little evidence of activities together. Andrew and Mary plan to marry in six months time.

Alf

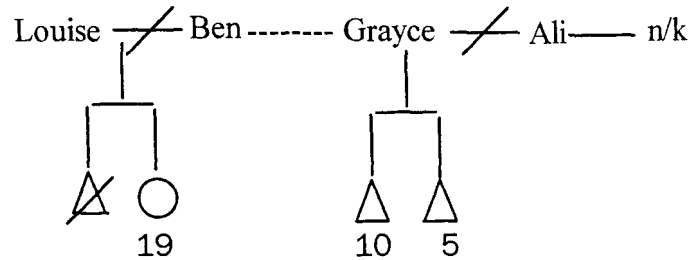


Alf is 42, his relationship deteriorated with his own father and he did not get on well with him as a teenager although there were occasional activities together and occasional displays of affection. Alf has previously had two significant relationships and many non-significant relationships (total significant relationships: three). He has been in this current relationship for eighteen months and cohabiting for one year. Diane was previously married for seven years and spent a further five years living alone. Alf works as a senior manager in a further education college earning £34,000 and Diane works part time as a fitness instructor, her earnings are not known although estimated to be 'less than £10,000'. Alf refers to the children as his partner's children and they refer to him by his first name. The non-resident father lives about forty miles away and sees the children monthly; Alf tolerates his involvement. There are plans to move and buy a house together.

transitions can be located within dysfunctional family experiences prior to divorce and separation and to difficult post-separation transitions (Block et al., 1986; Cherlin et al., 1991; Bray and Berger, 1993b). Nicholson and colleagues concluded that although children living in stepfamilies had increased risks of poor psychosocial outcomes, much of the association could be attributed to 'social, contextual, and individual factors that were present prior to the formation of a stepfamily' (Nicholson et al., 1999: 405). Continuing conflict between ex-spouses over visitation or child support, for example, is associated with poor adjustment for the children concerned (see for a review, Amato and Rezac, 1994). In some circumstances divorce may prove beneficial for the children concerned, where this results in the ending of inter-parental conflict (Hetherington and Camara, 1984; Peterson and Zill, 1986; Lamb et al., 1999).

In reviewing the outcomes of their study of a sample of the NCDS cohort, Gorell Barnes and colleagues agreed that domestic disharmony was a strong predisposing element negatively affecting children's behaviour. They concluded that although being a stepchild correlated with leaving school early, leaving home early and with marrying at a young age, it did not correlate with lack of success in adulthood in terms of employment and successful long-term marriage (Gorell Barnes et al., 1998). These findings were in line with others; Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994), for example, found that '[M]any children experiencing the divorce and remarriage of their parents appear to do well' (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994: 377). The 'pathogenic models of marital transitions' of earlier research are contrasted by more contemporary research 'focusing on the diversity of responses to divorce, life in a single parent household and remarriage' (Bray and Hetherington, 1993: 3).

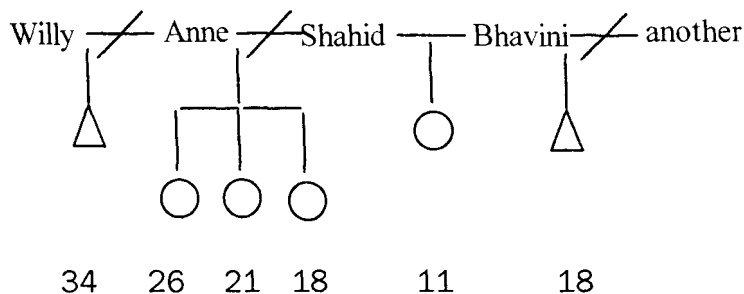
Ben



Ben, aged 39, was adopted at 6 weeks old and had a good relationship with his adoptive father, both active and affectionate. He was previously married for the last three years of a ten-year relationship and has a daughter of 19 and a son of 10, who was killed 6 months ago in a car accident. Divorce was due to Louise's inability to cope with Ben's disability status after returning from active military service. He has had many non-significant relationships since his divorce and has also had two significant relationships since that time. He has been cohabiting with Grayce in her house for eighteen months and maintains his own rented flat where he spends one or two nights each week. Grayce was previously married for seven years and subsequently spent two years living alone. Ben is a Disability Law Consultant earning £30,000 and Grayce is a Solicitor earning £50,000. Ben refers to Grayce's children as his partner's children and they call him Ben. Ali, the children's father lives abroad and sees them only on holidays; Ben encourages his involvement. There are no immediate plans for the future.

Traditionalists

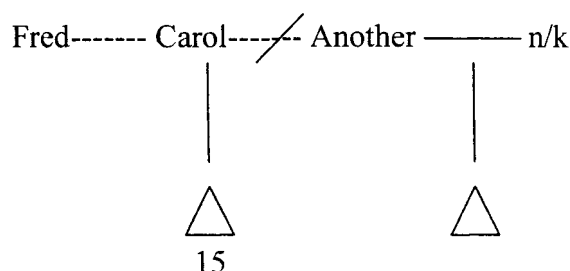
Shahid



Shahid is 52 years old and got on exceptionally well with his father. Although they were rarely active together, there were occasional displays of affection. He was previously married for thirteen years and left to form his current relationship, which he has been in for fifteen years and married for thirteen years. Bhavini was previously married for three years and spent five years living alone. Shahid

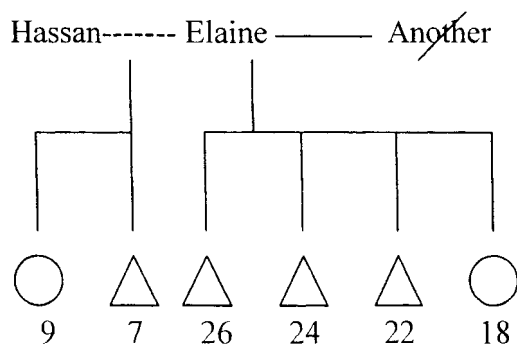
works as a financial advisor earning £30,000, and Bhavini works part time earning about £10,000. Shahid is referred to as Dad by all the children and he refers to all of them as his children. The non-resident father lives abroad and now has no contact with his son, although Shahid would acknowledge his involvement. Plans for the future; 'I must take it day to day'.

Fred



Fred is 32 years old and had a reasonably good relationship with his father as a child although there were no activities together and only rare displays of affection. He met Carol when he was 19 and this represents his only significant relationship, they have been together for thirteen years. Carol was previously married for eighteen months and lived alone for one year following her separation. Fred works as a branch manager for a paint firm earning a basic of £16,000 and Carol earns about £7000 from some part-time work. Fred refers to the child as his child and is referred to by him by his first name. The non-resident father, who has remarried and has another son, continues to see his son on a fortnightly basis and Fred acknowledges his involvement. Plans for the future; Fred thinks he should get married but has not got round to it yet.

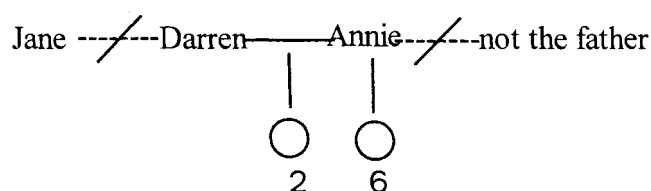
Hassan



Hassan is 42 years old and got on reasonably well with his father, although they were rarely active together there were occasional displays of affection. Prior to

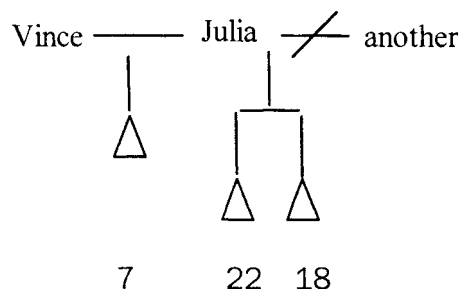
this relationship he was single and had one previous significant relationship. He has been in this current relationship for fourteen years and cohabiting for eleven years. Elaine was previously married for seven years prior to being widowed and subsequently lived alone for one year. Hassan is a lecturer in a further education college and earns £22,000, Elaine is a nurse working full time and earns £14,000. The children refer to Hassan as Dad and he refers to them as 'his' children. Plans for the future; 'I think my relationship is there for my own children'.

Darren



Darren is 36 years old and got on reasonably well with his father, there were regular activities together and frequent displays of affection. Darren had been cohabiting for two and a half years before meeting Annie and had six other significant relationships before that, all of which were cohabiting. Darren has been married for three years of a three and a half year relationship. Annie had been cohabiting, although when that relationship broke down she continued to live in the jointly purchased house, and became pregnant with her first child by another man, who has subsequently never been involved. She did not live alone. Darren is self-employed, providing training seminars for organisations and pays himself £25,000. Annie earns £30,000 working in administration. He refers to the children as 'his' children and they call him Dad. There is no contact with the non-resident father. Plans for the future; Annie is expecting another child.

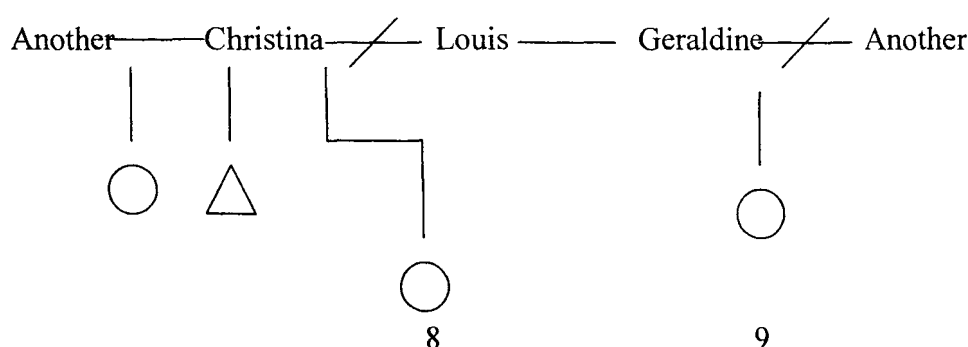
Vince



Vince is 38 years old and got on reasonably well with his father, although they were rarely active together and there was only rare displays of affection. He has

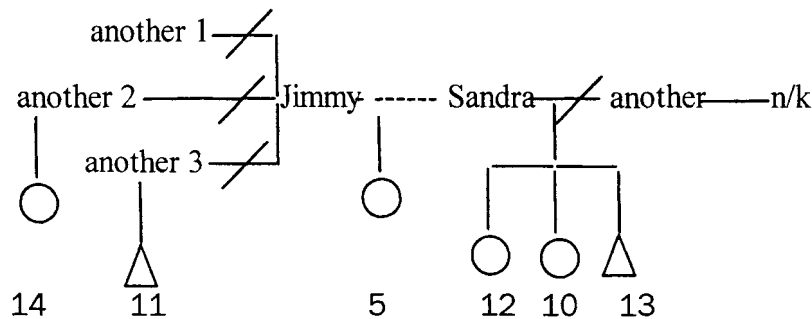
not previously been in a significant relationship. He has currently been in this relationship with Julia for twelve years and they have been married for ten years. Julia was previously married for five years following which she spent about four or five years living alone. Vince works in IT technical support and earns £45,000, while Julia works part time from home with a dressmaking business and earns £6,000. Vince refers to all the children as 'his' children and they refer to him by his first name, although his son uses Dad. The non- resident father lives abroad and sees his children only during holidays; Vince dislikes his involvement. The future 'more of the same'.

Louis



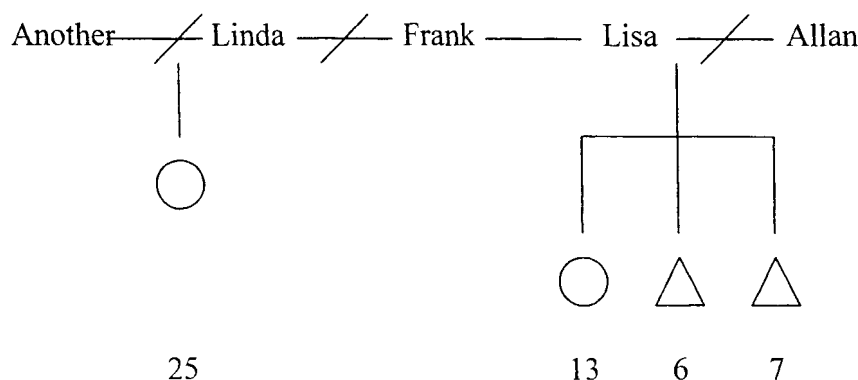
Louis is 42 years old, and got on well with his father, they were regularly active and he showed affection. He was previously married to Christina for four years, and she already had a son from a previous marriage; they subsequently had a daughter. Louis divorced Christina due to her being pregnant to the man she was subsequently to marry. Louis has had 2 significant relationships other than his marriages, one before the first marriage and one before his second marriage. Louis has lived with his current partner, Geraldine, for two years and been married for one year. Geraldine had previously been married for eleven years and spent one year living alone. Louis is self-employed as a Management Systems Consultant earning £120,000 and Geraldine is a nurse but provides medico-legal advice for Louis and earns £40,000. Louis refers to both his daughter and stepdaughter as 'his' daughters, and they call him Dad. He never sees his first stepson. The non-resident father lives nearby, sees his daughter monthly, this is welcomed by Louis, who sees his own daughter, who lives in the Midlands, monthly. They plan shortly to move into a larger house, jointly owned.

Jimmy



Jimmy is 44 years old and did not get on at all well with his father, they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection. He has been married three times, all for short periods of time, and has two children from those relationships. He has been in this current relationship now for ten years and has been cohabiting for nine years. Sandra was previously married for six years and did not have a period of living alone. Jimmy works part-time in the building trade earning £12,000 and Sandra works part-time cleaning earning £2,000. Jimmy refers to all the children as 'my children' and the children all refer to Jimmy as Dad. The non-resident-father has re-married and he sees his children monthly; Jimmy tolerates his involvement. Jimmy does not see his children from his previous marriages. Plans for the future; 'I'm gonna be 'appy until its time to go'.

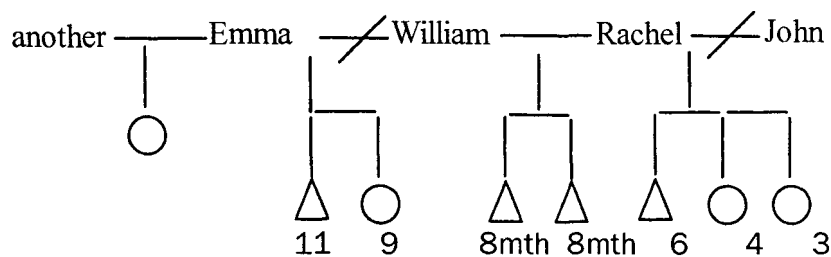
Frank



Frank is aged 41, did not get along well with his father, they were rarely active together and there was no display of affection; he left home at 16. He was previously married for fifteen years and his ex-wife already had a daughter from a previous marriage; he then lived alone for five years. He has been in this relationship for three and a half years and married for one year. Lisa was previously married for ten years and lived alone for three years. Frank is a police

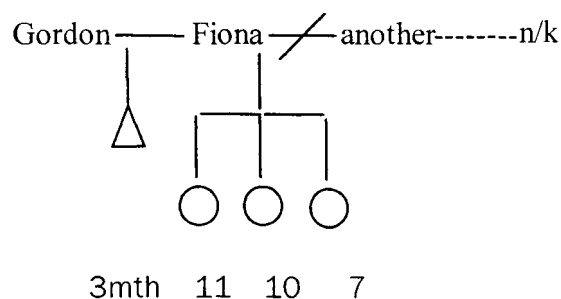
Sergeant earning £26,000 and Lisa works part time as a childminder earning £4,500. Frank refers to the children as 'the children' and they refer to Frank as both Dad and by his first name; his first stepdaughter calls him Dad. The non-resident father lives abroad and sees the children only during holidays; Frank acknowledges his involvement. Plans for the future; 'to take on the identity of Dad, full time'.

William



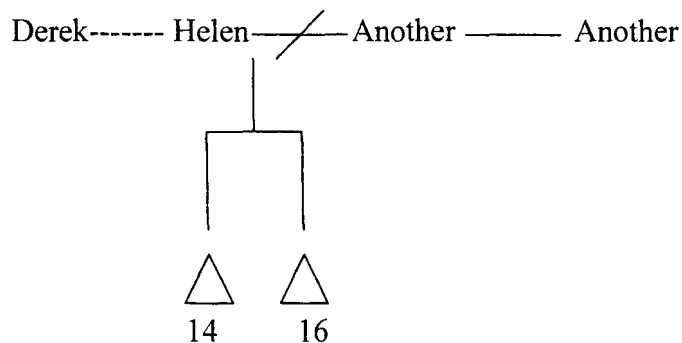
William is 31 years old, and got on reasonably well with his father, there were occasional activities together and occasional displays of affection. He was previously married for eight years, which was his only significant previous relationship. His marriage broke down when he was working abroad and his wife 'went off' with what is now her present husband. William has been in this current relationship for three years and married for two years. Emma was previously married for three years and did not live alone following the breakdown of that relationship. William is a Staff Sergeant in the army earning £22,000; Emma does not work outside the home and has no income. William refers to all the children by name and they all call him Dad. The non-resident father lives nearby and sees the children monthly and William welcomes his involvement. Plans for the future; William's children by his first marriage, currently co-resident, will return to live with their mother.

Gordon



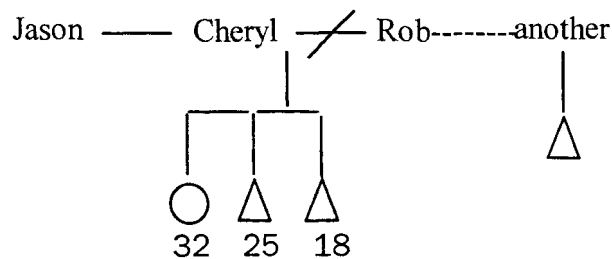
Gordon is 33 years old and got on reasonably well with his father, there were occasional activities together but no display of affection. Prior to this relationship he lived alone for about four years and has been involved in two significant relationships. He has been involved in this relationship for three and a half years and married for two years. Fiona was previously married for five years and spent about two years living alone. Gordon is a trainee police constable earning £22,000; Fiona does not work. Gordon refers to all the children as 'my children' and they call him Dad. The non-resident father has no contact with his children and is never mentioned. Plans for the future; 'a long and happy one'.

Derek



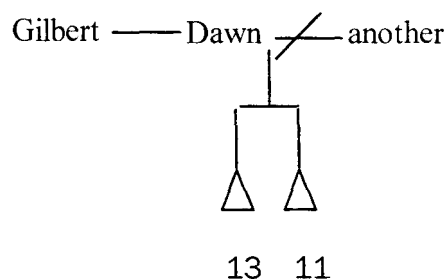
Derek is 32 years old and was adopted as a child; he got on reasonably well with his adoptive father although they were rarely active together and there was only rare displays of affection. He was single prior to this relationship and had been in one other significant relationship. Derek has been in this relationship for four years and married for three years. Helen was previously married for fifteen years and did not spend any time alone following the break down of that marriage. Derek runs his own computer company earning him £600,000 per year, Helen works part time and earns £5,000. Derek refers to the children as his stepchildren and they refer to him by his first name. There is a shared residence agreement and the children spend one week in every two with their father who lives nearby; Derek welcomes his involvement. Plans for the future; 'work less, adopt some children and move to the country'.

Jason



Jason is 48 years old and had a 'distant' relationship with his father, they were rarely active together and only rare displays of affection. He was single prior to this relationship and had two other significant relationships (total relationships: three). This relationship has lasted for fifteen years and he has been married for thirteen years. Cheryl was previously married for twenty years and did not live alone following her separation. Jason works as a freelance radio producer earning £25,000 and Cheryl is a television producer earning £46,000. Jason refers to the children as his stepchildren and they call him by his first name. The non-resident father has contact with his children on a weekly basis and Jason tolerates his involvement. The non-resident father is involved in another relationship and his partner has a son from a previous relationship. Plans for the future; Jason is looking forward to becoming a 'grandfather' as his stepdaughter is pregnant.

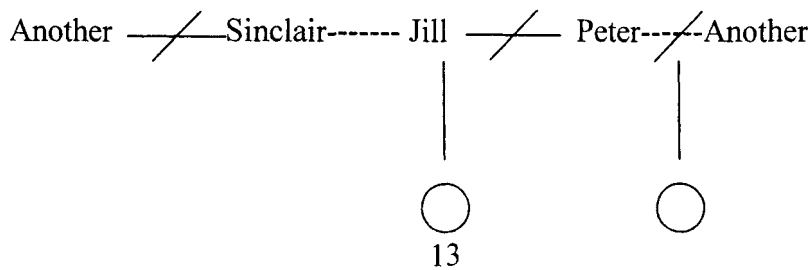
Gilbert



Gilbert is 43 years old and got on reasonably well with his father, there were occasional activities together but only rare displays of affection. He has had one previous significant relationship, which lasted two years and was single when he met Dawn (total relationships: two). He has been in this current relationship for five and a half years and has been married for three years; they did not live together until they married. Dawn had previously been married for five years and spent about three years living alone following her separation. Gilbert works for a shipping register in safety management, earning £29,000, Dawn does not work

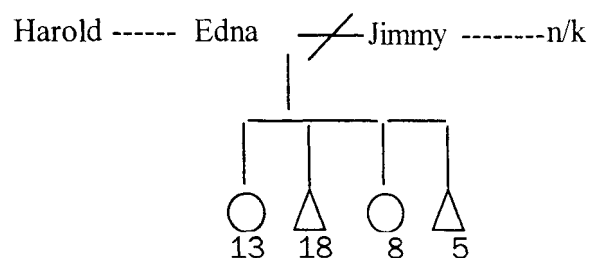
outside the home. Gilbert refers to the children as 'our kids' and is referred to by his first name. The non-resident father lives two hundred miles away and sees the children fortnightly; Gilbert welcomes his involvement. Plans for the future; 'We expect to be together until such time as one of us dies'.

Sinclair



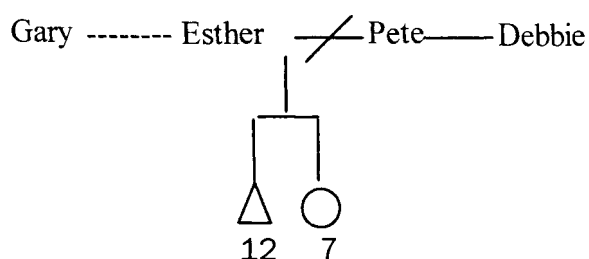
Sinclair is aged 45, he did not get on well with his father, there were no activities together and no display of affection; his parents divorced when he was about 15. Sinclair was previously married for eight years, which resulted in an amicable divorce due to both parties drifting apart. He has not had any other significant relationships prior to meeting Jill eight years ago (total relationships: two). They bought their current house together and began living together four years ago and were recently married. Jill was previously married for fifteen years and was separated for three to four years prior to meeting Sinclair during which time she lived alone. Sinclair is a civil engineer with an income of £60,000+ and Jill is an Academic Consultant with an income of £30,000. Sinclair gets on well with Jill's daughter aged thirteen and refers to her, mainly, as his daughter, and she calls him Sinclair. Peter, her father now lives abroad and sees her only during holidays and occasional visits; Sinclair acknowledges his involvement.

Harold



Harold is 33 years old and had a reasonably good relationship with his father which deteriorated in teenage years, they were occasionally active together but with no display of affection. He was previously in a non-cohabiting relationship that lasted for two and a half years, and has had four previous significant relationships (total relationships: five). He has been in this current relationship for three years and cohabiting for two years. Edna was previously married for eight years of a seventeen-year relationship and she had all the children prior to marriage. She spent a brief period living alone. Harold works as a window cleaner earning £18,000 and Edna works part time in a bar and earns £6,000. Harold refers to the children as 'the children' and is referred to by his first name. The non-resident father is not currently in touch with his children, although he lives nearby. Harold tolerates his involvement when he does see them. Plans for the future; possibly marriage.

Gary



Gary is 40 years old and did not get on well with his father, there were no activities together and no display of affection. Prior to this relationship he was single for one year and has had four significant relationships (total relationships: five). He has been cohabiting part time with Esther for three and a half years. She was previously married for twelve years and spent about three years living alone. Gary runs his own window cleaning business earning £30,000 and Esther works part time earning £11,000. Gary refers to the children by their first names and they refer to him by his first name. The non-resident father sees the children weekly and Gary welcomes his involvement. Future plans; Gary intends to sell his own flat and move in permanently.

1.7.4 The normative-adaptive perspective

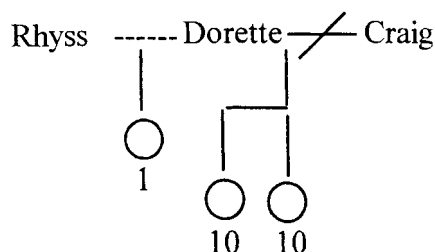
When the impact of factors external to stepfamilies, and which may have preceded stepfamily formation is considered, less emphasis is placed on the negative comparisons between stepfamilies and first-marriage families. This permitted the focus of research to shift from identifying weaknesses between different types of family formations to one where the quality and consistency of parenting that children received within stepfamilies was examined (Kurdek, 1994). Researchers within the normative/adaptive perspective recognised that there was a diversity of routes into and through family transitions. They accounted for family histories and gave consideration to the potential for subsequent family reorganisation and re-stabilisation of the family system that follows a period of transition (Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992).

Bray and Berger (1993b) advanced a developmental family systems approach, which integrated a family systems approach with the evolving system of stepfamilies. Hetherington and Jodl (1994) contend that 'using a developmental, contextual, family systems perspective has been an important advance in understanding factors that moderate and mediate short and long-term outcomes of marital transitions' (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994: 76).

Several researchers have identified that successful stepfamily formation is based upon a strong marital relationship (Ganong and Coleman, 1994; Visher, 1994), biological parents sustaining strong relationships with their children and new partners, establishment of strong step-parent-stepchild relationships, children's adaptation to a new parental structure, and building strong step or half-sibling relationships (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Furthermore, Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan conclude that:

Stepfamilies that weather the initial challenges of family formation tend to be those that recognise that building a sense of family takes time,

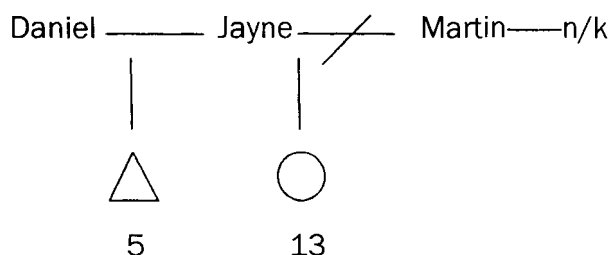
Rhyss



Rhyss is aged 43 and did not get on well with his father, there were no activities together and no display of affection. Rhyss was previously involved in three cohabiting relationships, the last one for eleven years. He has cohabited with Dorette for two years of a four-year relationship and they have a one-year-old mutual daughter. Rhyss gets along reasonably well with Dorette's daughters. Although there is little evidence of activities together, Rhyss does a lot of 'taxiing' which enables him to spend time with the children. Rhyss works full time in IT and earns £45,000, Dorette works part time and earns £16,000. The non-resident father is regularly involved with his children; this is welcomed by Rhyss. The non-resident father makes regular financial contributions.

Co-operative caretakers

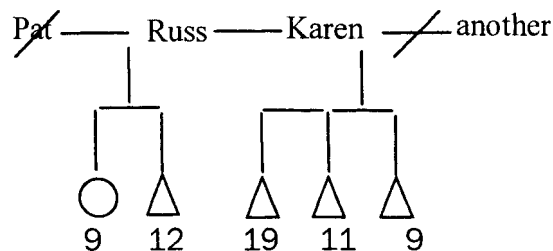
Daniel



Daniel is aged 38, got along well with his father, many activities together but little display of affection. Daniel had two previous long-term relationships prior to this, his first marriage. He moved into the house that his wife and her daughter were already living in. Jayne was previously married for ten years and spent approximately one year living on her own. Daniel and Jayne have been married for six years of an eight-year relationship and have a mutual son aged 5. Daniel works full time and earns approximately £20,000. Jayne also works full time,

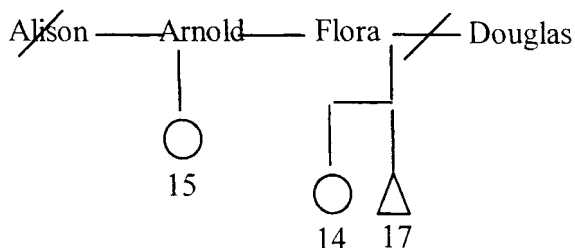
during school terms, her income is approximately £12,000. Daniel gets on very well with Jayne's daughter and they are involved in a range of activities. The non-resident father lives in Wales and only sees his daughter during holidays, about three times per year. Daniel does not encourage his involvement, but recognizes the role he has as a biological father.

Russ



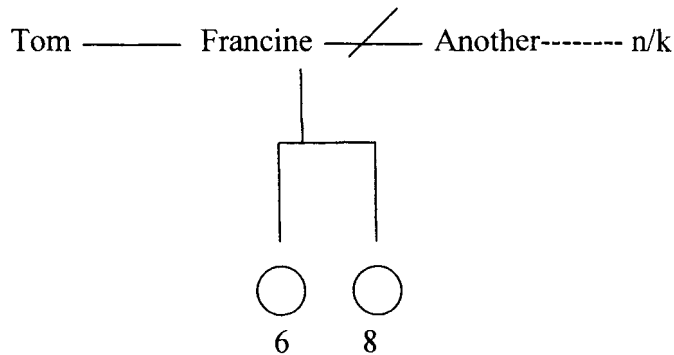
Russ is 43 and got on exceptionally well with his father, there were occasional activities together and frequent displays of affection. He was previously married for ten years of a twelve-year relationship until widowed. He had one significant relationship prior to that. He has been in the current relationship for two and a half years and married for two years. Karen was previously married for six years and spent three years living alone. Russ works as a computer consultant for an insurance company and earns £40,000; Karen does not work. Russ refers to all the children as 'his children' and they all call him Dad. The non-resident father continues to live in the area and sees his children fortnightly; Russ acknowledges his involvement. 'The future is good because we have all had to cope with stresses'.

Arnold



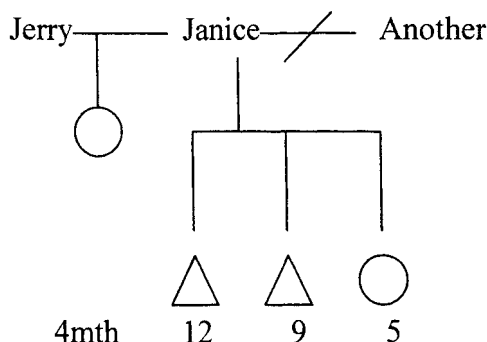
Arnold is aged 46, he got on well with his father and recalls various activities together and occasional displays of affection. Arnold's first wife died and he subsequently met Flora. He has been married for seven years of a nine-year relationship. He did not cohabit prior to becoming married. Arnold gets on very well with his own daughter and gets on very well with Flora's daughter, he gets on reasonably well with Flora's son, who was adopted during her previous marriage. Arnold is regularly active with the children in a range of indoor and outdoor activities. Flora was previously married for thirteen years and lived alone for one year. Arnold works full time and earns £40,000, Flora works from home and earns £6,000. The non-resident father is involved with the children on a monthly basis, although he never makes any financial contributions. Arnold acknowledges the non-resident father's role with his children.

Tom



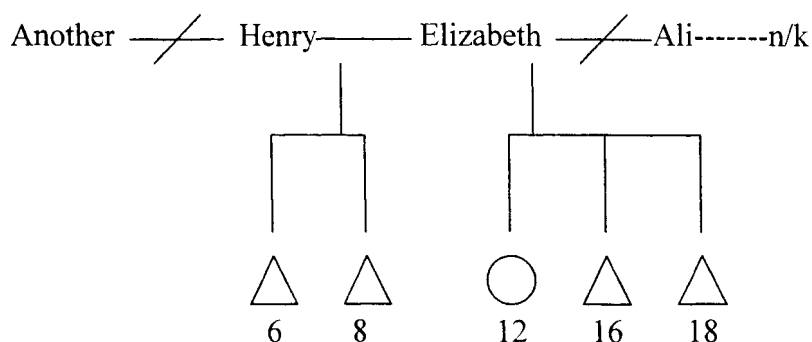
Tom is 31 years old; his father died while he was in his teens and he remembers that he neither got along well or not well with him, there were occasional activities together and rare displays of affection. He was single prior to this relationship and had been in one previous significant relationship. Tom has been in this relationship for three years and married for two and a half years. Francine was previously married for five years and subsequently lived alone for two years. Tom works as a freelance photographer earning £120,000; Francine earns £10,000 working part-time as an actress. Tom refers to the children as 'the children' and they refer to him by a pet name. He acknowledges the involvement of the non-resident father, there is a shared parenting agreement and the children spend part of each week in both homes. Plans for the future; there is a mutual child due.

Jerry



Jerry is 37, and did not get on well with his father, they were not active together and there was no display of affection. Jerry was married for three years of a ten year relationship which ended due to him having an affair with a woman with whom he subsequently cohabited for one year, he then lived alone for nine months before meeting Janice. They have been married for eighteen months of a two-year relationship. Janice was previously married although it is not known for how long, and spent two years living alone. Jerry is a computer technician earning £45,000. Janice does not work and has no income. He refers to all the children as 'his' children and they refer to him by his first name. The non-resident father works and lives abroad and only sees the children infrequently; Jerry tolerates his involvement. Plans for the future; 'to move into a large house and to give the children all that they need for a good start in life'.

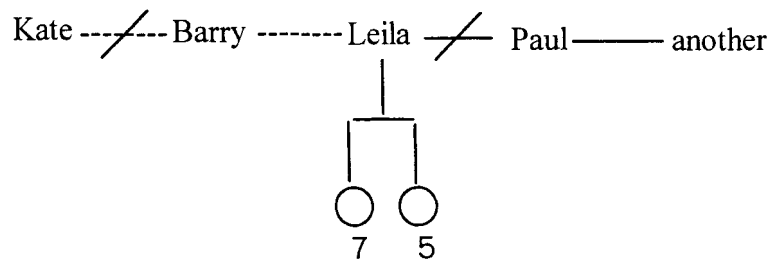
Henry



Henry aged 43, got on well with his father, they were active together and he showed affection. He was previously married for seven years and separated; he bought a house in another area and his wife got a better job in the previous area and chose not to move with him. He has had two other significant relationships both prior to his first marriage. He spent one year living alone before meeting Elizabeth and they have been married for six years of a ten year relationship where they were cohabiting prior to marriage. Elizabeth had previously been

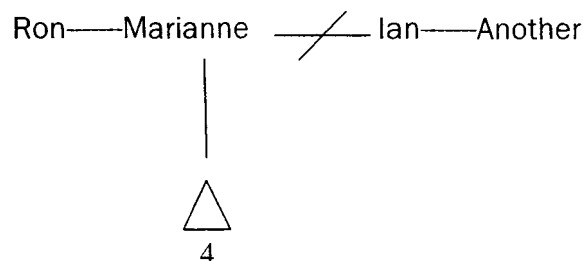
married for thirteen years and did not spend any time living alone following her separation. Henry is a Youth Worker earning £25,000 and Elizabeth is a part time Social Worker earning £10,000. Henry refers to all the children as 'his' and they all call him Henry, although his own children sometimes use 'Dad'. The stepchildren's father lives a short distance away but sees them only during holidays. Henry dislikes his involvement with the children. Plans for the future; 'more of the same'.

Barry



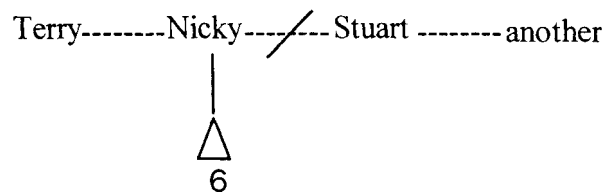
Barry is aged 31, and got on reasonably well with his father, there were occasional activities together but only rarely displayed affection. He had been in a four-year non-cohabiting relationship which came to a 'natural' end; his partner was not interested in having children. He has had two other significant relationship prior to this (total relationships: three). Barry has been in his current relationship for four and a half years and been cohabiting for one year. Leila was previously cohabiting with her children's father for ten years and although spent one year living alone she was already in this current relationship. Barry works as a hospital anaesthetist earning £39,000 and Leila works as a part time doctor earning £20,000. Barry refers to the children as his stepchildren and they refer to him by a pet name. The non-resident father has since married, continues to live locally and sees the children regularly. Barry welcomes his involvement with the children. Plans for the future; there is a mutual child due, there are plans to marry shortly, and to purchase a house.

Ron



Ron is 39 years old, and did not get on well with his father as a young child but this improved slightly during his teenage years and they were occasionally active together although he rarely displayed affection. Ron was single prior to this current relationship, due to his previous girlfriend 'moving on'. He has had two previous significant relationships (total relationships: three). Ron has been in this relationship for three years and cohabiting for two years. Marianne was previously married for 5 years and has not spent a period living alone. Ron works as an Internet author earning £25,000 per year and Marianne is a university lecturer earning £25,000. Ron refers to the child by his name and is in turn referred to by a pet name. The non-resident father is in a cohabiting relationship and sees his son fortnightly; Ron tolerates his involvement with the child. Ron is engaged to Marianne and would like to marry but Marianne is hesitant.

Terry



Terry is 34 years old and got on exceptionally well with his father, there were regular activities together and frequent displays of affection. This is his first significant relationship. He has been in this current relationship for three years and married for ten months. Nicky was previously cohabiting with Stuart for one year and then spent two and a half years living alone. Terry is a detective constable earning £30,000 and Nicky works full time as a nurse earning £16,000. Terry refers to the child as his stepchild and is referred to by his first name. Stuart, the non-resident father sees his son weekly and Terry welcomes his involvement. Terry is 'confident' about the future.

Appendix XV: Stepfathers' origins and current social class position

Stepfather	Job title	Fathers' social class position	Highest qualification	Social Class position now
Shahid	Financial Advisor	I	A Level	II
Hassan	College Lecturer	II	Post Grad	II
Gary	Small business owner	IIIN	O Level	IV
Gilbert	Master Mariner	IIIN	Degree	II
Jimmy	Building labourer	IV	None	IV
Bernard	Theatre Manager	IV	O Level	IIIN
Gordon	Police Constable	IIIN	A Level	IIIN
Harold	Window Cleaner	IIIN	A Level	V
Alf	College Manager	II	Degree	II
Matt	Unemployed	IIIN	None	IV
Terry	Detective	IV	Post Grad	II
Russ	Computer Consultant	IIIM	Degree	II
Frank	Police Sergeant	IIIN	O Level	IIIN
Bill	IT Trainer	II	A Level	IIIN
Jason	Radio Producer	II	Degree	II
Fred	Paint depot manager	V	None	IV
Allan	Electrician	IIIM	None	IIIM
Derek	Company Director	II	O Level	I
Jack	Administrator	IIIN	A Level	IIIN
Darren	Education Trainer	II	Degree	IIIN
Vince	IT Technical Support	IIIM	O Level	IIIM
Tom	Photographer	I	Degree	II
William	Staff Sergeant	IIIM	O Level	IIIN
Ron	Internet Author	IIIM	Degree	II
Barry	Anaesthetist	II	Post Grad	I
Jerry	Computer Engineer	IIIN	A Level	II
Louis	IT Consultant	IIIN	A Level	II
Henry	Youth Worker	II	A Level	II
Sinclair	Civil Engineer	IIIN	Post Grad	I
Ben	Disability Consultant	IIIN	A Level	IIIN
Daniel	Housing Manager	IIIN	A Level	IIIN
Andrew	Store Salesman	IIIM	A Level	IIIN
Arnold	Telecommunication Engineer/Manager	IIIM	A Level	II
Chris	Education Consultant	IV	Degree	II
Rhyss	Computer consultant	IIIN	A Level	II

(OPCS, 1991)



family boundaries must be flexible to accommodate existing ties to non-custodial parents and extended family, and stepparents cannot replace biological parents and may need to develop a separate non-traditional parenting role (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999: 139).

The relationships and interactions between parents and children, step-parents and stepchildren, siblings and stepsiblings and other wider kin are viewed in terms of the contributions they offer to a process through which children and adults experience alternative family settings, as 'normative lifestyle choices' (Coleman and Ganong, 1990: 930), where some may be better than others.

1.7.5 Stepfamily transitions

It is important to consider the events that preceded the formation of stepfamilies and the implications these can have, in terms of children's outcomes, and for the relationships they form with stepfathers. The changes that first-marriage families experience as a result of family transitions are diverse, and not all are common to all families. However, researchers have identified that families will experience some of a number of factors. For example, there is likely to be a change of residence for some or all family members, as in the majority of cases the adult couple no longer co-reside. For mothers and their children, this often results in a period of living as a lone-parent family, which is associated with a reduction in their available financial resources (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999; McLanahan and Teitler, 1999; CPAG, 2000; CSA, 2001). The income inequality and associated power relations in marriage are further polarised by separation and divorce (Vogler and Pahl, 1994). The impoverishment of women as lone-mothers is due in part to a reduction in household income with the departure of the children's father (Jarvis and Jenkins, 1999; Smock et al., 1999), to a lack of access that lone-mothers have to economic resources in terms of employment (McLanahan and Sandefur,

1994), or to a lack of financial support from the children's non-resident fathers (Seltzer, 1991; Amato, 1999).

The formation of a stepfamily with the arrival of a stepfather may improve the lone mother's circumstances by providing emotional support for her, physical support with child rearing, and financial support through economic contributions (Furstenberg, 1987; Zill, 1994). However, some stepfathers may be unwilling to make extensive financial commitments to stepfamilies (Amato, 1999), they may lack commitment to stepchildren (McLanahan and Teitler, 1999), and may compete with children for their mother's time and attention (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Margolin, 1992; Brooks-Gunn, 1994). All or some of these factors may lead to further disruption for the children concerned (Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992).

Stepfamilies have been identified as being more likely than first-marriage families to experience conflict about child rearing and the financial support of children, lack of cohesion, ambiguity about role expectations, stress and problems associated with child adjustment (Anderson and White, 1986; Amato, 1987; Bray 1988; Bray and Berger, 1993a; Zill et al., 1993; Barber and Lyons, 1994; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994).

Johnson's (1980) study identified nine major sources of conflict within stepfamilies: discipline and who should be responsible for administering it, eating together or separately, division of labour within the household, attitudes towards sex and nakedness, use of alcohol, attitudes towards obligations, personal behaviour, household rules and the acceptable level of disagreement or hostility. Other sources of conflict have been found to be children over school age upon arrival of a stepfather, the child's gender, the length of time children lived in a lone-mother family prior to stepfamily formation, the length of time the

stepfamily has been formed, and the birth of half-siblings (Pasley and Healow, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1989; Coleman and Ganong, 1990; Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Allan and Crow, 2001). Adolescent children find the transition to a stepfamily more difficult than pre-adolescent or pre-school age children (Bray, 1988; Pasley and Healow, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1989; Amato and Keith, 1991; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; White, 1994b; Dunn et al., 2000). Even after mothers had been married to stepfathers for two years, adolescent children were found to be less positive towards stepfathers when compared to younger children (Hetherington et al., 1989; Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Ganong et al., 1999). Although girls can become uncommunicative with stepfathers and can be contemptuous towards them, more boys (one-third) than girls (one-quarter) are likely to become disengaged from their stepfamilies (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994).

Stepfather-stepchild relationships deteriorate over time, and often result in disengagement between stepfathers and stepchildren⁶ (White, 1992; Bray and Berger, 1993a; Fine and Kurdek, 1995; Hetherington, 1989, 1993).

Disengaged parenting is characterised by moderate levels of negativity, low levels of involvement and rapport, lack of warmth, discipline, control, and monitoring of stepchildren's behaviour (Hetherington, 1987; Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Thompson et al., 1992; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Fine and colleagues defined warmth as 'the extent to which parents support, spend time with and communicate with their child or adolescent', and control is defined as 'the degree to which parents set and enforce limits and monitor their child's or adolescent's activities' (Fine et al., 1997: 505).

⁶ See Jacobson (1995) for a detailed discussion of the psychological development of children and their relationship with adults occupying different roles.

However, several studies found that stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren is associated with improved stepfather-stepchild relationships (Amato, 1987; Marsiglio, 1992; Papernow, 1993; MacDonald and DeMaris, 1996; Robertson, 2004). Stepfather-stepchild relationships were stronger where stepchildren were co-resident (Ambert, 1986), where stepfathers had fewer adult relationship transitions and had partners with similar adult relationship histories (Kurdek et al., 1995), where stepfathers were well educated, were high income earners, and where stepfamilies were of relatively long duration (Dunn et al., 1998).

1.8 Stepfamilies: challenging settings for stepfathers

Stepfathers' roles are not clearly defined by social or legal norms in the way that biological fathers' roles are (Fine et al., 1998). Stepfathers are uncertain about their rights and responsibilities (Hanson et al., 1996), have difficulty identifying reference points with which to construct their roles, and are said to experience role ambiguity (White and Booth, 1985; Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987; Giles-Sims, 1987; Brand et al., 1988; Kurdek and Fine, 1991; Marsiglio, 1992).

According to role theory, roles are symbols associated with positions in society that provide norms and behaviour (Thoits, 1992). Attached to these roles are identities and self-conceptions of an individual's position in a social structure based on social relationships (Stryker, 1968). Meanings and role expectations are acquired through social interaction (Minton and Pasley, 1996). When people with different family histories come together, as in stepfamilies, contradictory role expectations can lead to role ambiguity (Degarmo and Forgatch, 2002). Role ambiguity is defined by King and King (1990) as uncertainty with regard to the scope of responsibilities, the behaviours required to fulfil these responsibilities, about whose expectations a person's behaviour must meet, and the effects of that behaviour on oneself and on others.

Institutional and social guidelines exist for first-marriage families, which provide normative order for the role performance of individuals within them. Burgoyne and Clark (1984) described roles and responsibilities in first-marriage families as given, taken for granted, whereas in stepfamilies they are subject to negotiation as there are few guiding social norms (Keshet, 1990). Furthermore, stepfathers suffer from a lack of role clarity with regard to the extent to which they should become involved with their stepchildren (Fine et al., 1997). This in turn can lead to instability in their relationships (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). Schwebel et al. (1991) add that the public perception of the step-parent's role is ambiguous, which contributes to the ambiguity experienced by stepfathers. Marsiglio comments that in the past twenty years, 'Not much has changed in this regard; considerable confusion still exists about what norms should guide stepfamily life' (Marsiglio, 2004: 70).

A dominant theoretical perspective of stepfamily formation is Cherlin's (1978) 'incomplete-institutionalisation' hypothesis. Cherlin suggested that remarried families and stepfamilies experienced greater stress than first-marriage families as they 'lack normative prescriptions for role performance, institutionalised procedures to handle problems and easily accessible social support' (Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane, 1992: 217). Robinson (1991) identified characteristics of stepfamilies as lack of integration, loyalty conflicts, lack of a common past history, lack of institutional support, poorly defined legislation, an apparent lack of shared language and customs, transition stresses, and stepfathers' often unrealistic expectations of stepfamily living. Other factors can be involved in increasing stepfathers' role ambiguity, for example, when non-resident biological fathers maintain regular contact (see Fine and Fine, 1992; Smart and Neale, 1999a), or where step-siblings co-reside (Marsiglio, 1992).

Critics of the 'incomplete-institutionalisation' hypothesis claim that it is predicated upon an assumption that a normative family behaviour exists, and that it assumes different explanations of instability for first and subsequent marriages (Jacobson, 1995). Subsequent marriages are reported to be more open, more egalitarian and more pragmatic in their approach to household and childcare tasks than first marriages (Bray and Berger, 1993a). They tend to be less romantic, with a greater willingness to confront conflict (Furstenberg, 1982; 1987; Giles-Sims, 1984; 1987; Coleman and Ganong, 1990). Subsequent marriages are also less stable than first-marriages (Bray and Berger, 1993a; Hetherington and Henderson, 1997), and cohabiting relationships are even less stable (Bumpass et al., 1995; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000). Although there are more potential sources of conflict in remarriages and stepfamilies, remarriage and stepchildren are not necessarily associated with more frequent conflict than first marriages (MacDonald and DeMaris, 1995). Bray et al. (1994) found that mothers and stepfathers in the same families were in agreement that stepfathers were expected to be friendly, supportive of their partners and not to act as the primary disciplinarian (Fine, 1995; Fine et al., 1998). Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) suggest that the lack of firm guidelines may provide stepfathers with opportunities for negotiating roles and relationships.

It is clear from the stepfamily literature that there are many challenges faced by stepfamily members that are not experienced, or are experienced in different ways, by members of first-marriage families. The implication of these findings for stepfathers is that they are likely to be faced with various factors in forming stepfamilies and in stepfather-stepchild relationships that do not apply to biological fathers in first-marriage families and in co-resident biological father-child relationships. In order to clarify some of the similarities and differences between biological fathers and stepfathers, the next section will present a review

of relevant fatherhood research and will be followed by a review of relevant stepfather literature.

1.9 Fatherhood research

The dominance of the biological father model as a normative concept suggests that many stepfathers may seek to understand their roles from within a knowledge of fatherhood gained either through 'expert' discourses located within psychological research (see for examples, O'Brien, 1984; Lewis, 1986; 2000; Pruett, 1987; Lamb, 1987; 1999; Russell, 1987; 1999; Lewis et al., 2002), sociological and multi-disciplinary research (see for examples, Bergsten and Back-Wiklund, 1996; Dienhart, 1998; Warin et al., 1999; Dowd, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Mandell, 2002; Welsh et al., 2002), through media representation, or from their experiences of their own fathers (Rosenthal and Keshet, 1981; Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Burgoyne and Clark (1982) believed there were many parallels between fatherhood and stepfatherhood. This section will review the roles biological fathers have, the ways these have changed over time, and the ways in which they are involved with their biological children. The theoretical implications of fathers' involvement with, and care for, their children will be reviewed in the context of the potential this may offer for developing an understanding of stepfathers' 'parenting' practices.

Much of the fatherhood literature uses the terms 'father', 'fatherhood', and 'fathering' loosely and interchangeably. However, Hobson and Morgan (2002) provide definitions of these terms that will be useful in the context of this study. They note that the use of the term 'father' concerns the 'processes by which this term becomes attached to a particular individual'. This permits a 'distinction between the biological and the social father' and analysis of the privileges associated with biological fathers. The term 'fatherhood' relates to 'rights,

duties, responsibilities and statuses that are attached to fathers', whilst 'fathering' identifies a set of practices that signifies 'doing' as distinct from fatherhood as an identity or 'being' (Hobson and Morgan, 2002: 10). The use of the term 'fathering' recognises a 'plurality of fathering practices rather than the unified normative model of fatherhood' (Morgan, 2002b: 278), and enables a distinction to be made between social action (fathering) and social construction (fatherhood). Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) note that researchers have in the past tended to focus on role occupancy (fatherhood); only more recently has the research focus shifted towards the practice of fathering, that is, the extent to which fathers become involved with their children.

1.9.1 Fathers' roles and change

Historically, the image of fatherhood has undergone a cultural shift. A traditional view of fatherhood has been to emphasise the gendered nature of parenting; the involved mother and the distant father⁷. The distant, authoritarian, disciplinarian of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave way to the disengaged breadwinner of the first half of the twentieth century, to be replaced by the 'modern' father of the latter half of the twentieth century, with a greater focus on father-child interaction in terms of successful child development (O'Brien and Jones, 1995). Several researchers such as Lamb (1987), Pleck (1987), and Furstenberg (1988), suggest that there is evidence at the end of the twentieth century to indicate the 'emergent' model of fathering, with a focus on fathers' potential for the nurturing of children. For fathers, providing the financial support for their families, through employment, disciplining children and being a role model (Mintz, 1998) has been a reinforcing feature of their masculine role. Traditional notions of masculinity were

⁷ See Knijn (1995) for a discussion on the origins of parenting gender roles, which she links closely to the process of industrialisation.

perceived to be incompatible with becoming actively involved in childcare (Lamb, 1987; Barker, 1994; Connell, 1995), and resulted in fathers' continued resistance to increase their role as carers for their children.

Critics of this historical development suggest it oversimplifies fatherhood, which was and remains, complex and variable (Amato et al., 2000), and it ignores other factors such as social class, ethnicity and levels of education (McKee and O'Brien, 1982). Although fathers in previous generations may not always have been involved with their children in the practical, 'hands-on' sense, many demonstrated commitment to their families, 'cared about' their children and were conscious of their needs through their focus on 'breadwinning' and involvement in other activities (Lewis, 1986; 1995; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006).

The traditional role of fathers as the authority figure, the disciplinarian and the provider is being swept away by wider cultural and social changes (Moss, 1995). Fathers are considered to have become more than merely economic providers, and have become involved in providing some of the physical and emotional care for their children (O'Brien and Shelmit, 2003). Several theorists have suggested that rather than a unified model of masculinity, it is more appropriate to recognise a plurality of masculinities in relation to fathering (Collier, 1995; Connell, 1995;⁸ Morgan, 2002b). Examples can be drawn from fathers who stay at home for longer periods of time (Brandth and Kvande, 1998), work from home whilst their partners go out to work (French, 1995), or remain in the home being full-time child-carers whilst their partners provide financial support through their work outside the home (Robinson and Barrett, 1986; Dienhart, 1998). Recent changes to employment legislation in the UK have introduced shared

⁸ Connell (1995) provides a discussion of masculinities. See also Lupton and Barclay (1997) for a review of feminist and 'masculine' literature on fatherhood.

parental leave⁹ and have begun to focus attention on the father's responsibility towards child-care¹⁰. However, several researchers maintain that fathers' identities continue to be largely formed outside the home, and involvement with children is seen as an addition to their provider role in a society that values earning more highly than caring (Lewis, 2002; Vogler, 2005). Smart and Neale concluded that:

Although we acknowledge that men's behaviour may well be changing, we would still suggest that for the majority of fathers, fathering is something they have to fit into a schedule dominated by employment, which tends to mean their core identity is generated elsewhere (Smart and Neale, 1999b: 118).

Although contemporary fathers are unlikely to be the sole family breadwinners as sixty-two percent of families have two income earners (General Household Survey, 1998), they may still tend to consider themselves as 'breadwinners' (Lewis, 2000; Lewis et al., 2002). Even in dual-earner households, the majority of fathers remain peripheral as carers (Burghes et al., 1997). Fathers do not do their share of household chores, and they remain largely uninvolved with, or unavailable to, provide child-care, often using work as a rationale for not being present in the home (Williams, 2002). Children's mothers generally have greater involvement in family issues than children's fathers (Backett, 1987). Although recent research has confirmed that roles of fathers varied greatly, involvement tends to be judged against a maternal benchmark (Warin et al., 1999). Some men derive greater satisfaction from their involvement in family activities than from work (Pleck, 1986), and when the caring role is undertaken by men, it is often identified as being particularly praiseworthy (Lamb et al., 1987a; Rose and Bruce, 1995). However, with the possible exception of lone fathers (see O'Brien, 1982; Barker, 1994), the extent of fathers' involvement with caring for their

⁹ From the 6th April 2003, paid paternity leave was made available to employees in the UK, for up to two weeks during the first year following the birth of a child.

¹⁰ The concept of care will be discussed fully later, see Chapter 3.



children is less than, and conducted in different ways to, that provided by the majority of children's mothers (Lamb et al., 1987a; LaRossa, 1988; Pleck, 1997).

Contemporary fathers are regarded as being dissatisfied with, and to have rejected, the fathering practices associated with their own fathers, in which they were out of the home for much of the time and had little involvement in the practical aspects of raising their families (Rosenthal and Keshet, 1981; Lamb et al., 1987a; Bjornberg, 1995; van Dongen, 1995; Brandth and Kvande, 1998). The findings of some fatherhood studies suggest that fathers seek to repeat their satisfactory experiences and compensate for unsatisfactory experiences of being fathered (Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Bruce and Fox, 1999) by being less disciplinarian, more communicative, more caring and more involved with their children than their own fathers (Gorell Barnes et al., 1997). Other researchers suggest that men are seeking a variety of sources from which to learn fathering practices, for example, from among their peers, by observing other fathers, and through guidance from their wives or partners (Daly, 1993; Bjornberg, 1995; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Gorrell Barnes et al., 1997; Dunn et al., 2000). However small these changes in fathers' roles and fathering practices are, they have affected the way some fathers think about fatherhood and have led to a change in role identification and involvement with children.

1.9.2 Theories of fathers' involvement

Lamb and colleagues stated that paternal involvement is not to be regarded as a 'universally desirable goal' Lamb et al. (1987a: 109). They suggested that opportunities should be made available for the increased involvement of those fathers who wanted to be more involved in their children's lives. Lamb and colleagues conceptualised a foundation for fathers' involvement as comprising

three main elements. The first is time spent interacting with children through, for example, playing, feeding, disciplining. The second is availability or accessibility of parents, physically and psychologically, to meet children's needs. The third aspect is accountability, where parents are actively involved in planning children's lives (Lamb et al., 1987b). This conception has led a number of researchers to highlight the complexity of father involvement and the importance of the quality of paternal involvement over quantitatively measured involvement (see Palkowitz, 1997; Hawkins and Palkowitz, 1999; Jaffee et al., 2003). This places less emphasis on a gender divide in parenting roles and on fathers' economic support, and focuses more on 'the role fathers play in the direct care of children of all ages' (Lamb, 1987: 4).

Russell (1999) suggests that the concept of fathers' involvement should be considered in broader terms. Russell effectively expanded Lamb and colleagues' conceptualisation and identified six 'domains' which described different aspects of parental commitment (Russell, 1999: 58). Within each domain, Russell suggested the focus should be at two levels: (a) who is the adult involved and the extent of their involvement; and (b) who is the adult who has responsibility for that domain. Although this does not radically alter Lamb and colleagues' conceptualisation of father involvement, Russell does focus heavily on responsibility as a key element of paternal involvement. He also identifies commitment as being central, and has provided a working guide with which to examine 'paternal participation in family life' (Russell, 1999: 59).

Through their children, fathers are also presented with opportunities for wider involvement in their communities, in a variety of institutions and a range of organisations including children's schools, community activities, or other children's sporting activities. Fathers' involvement in such activities 'can profoundly shape the lives of men' (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001: 392). The

quality or nature of involvement can also provide benefits to fathers in terms of shaping their own personal identities, developing self-esteem, offering life satisfaction, and gaining a sense of maturity and status. Involvement may also result in increased spousal praise, enhancing fathers' role identity and encouragement to maintain their involvement (Levine and Pitt, 1995; Hawkins and Palkowitz, 1999; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Pasley et al., 2001).

Although not all fathers are involved in the same way, those most involved with their children were found to be more competent, satisfied, and to invest more in their role (Minton and Pasley, 1996). Researchers have sought to account more fully for fathers' cognitive contributions and the ways in which fathers' involvement can aid children's acquisition of social skills and understanding of moral values, and enhance children's social capital (Robinson and Barrett, 1986; Lamb, 1987; Russell, 1987; Furstenberg, 1998).

Rather than being static and shaped by external forces, fathering is regarded as, 'dynamic, contextual and a continuing project, something that requires work and thoughtful practice and is therefore created through social and cultural processes' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997: 5).

Although biological fathers' care-giving develops as their parenting develops, alongside their partner's care-giving (Visser and Visser, 1983), it may be subject to more negotiation than previously considered (Backett, 1987; Bjornberg, 1995). Children's mothers mediate the extent and quality of fathers' involvement with their children by acting as 'gatekeepers' to fathering (van Dongen, 1995; Edwards et al., 1999a; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Dowd, 2000; Walker and McGraw, 2000; Lewis et al., 2002), and continue to do so in post-divorce relationships where fathers' involvement with children has to

be renegotiated (Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; Minton and Pasley, 1996; Smart and Neale, 1999a; Warin et al., 1999; Neale and Smart, 2002).

In a recent study of mothers' gatekeeping, Fagan and Barnett (2003) found that when mothers rated fathers as being competent parents, they engaged in less gatekeeping. Competent parenting was positively related to the fathers' involvement with their children. Whilst Fagan and Barnett identified the limitations of their study in that it was obtained from a convenience sample, only mothers were interviewed, and it only made reference to biological fathers' involvement with children, it highlighted the centrality of mothers' gatekeeping for fathers' involvement with children.

1.10 Negotiated responsibilities and commitments

Negotiation is regarded as a key element of men's involvement with children either as co-resident biological fathers, non-resident biological fathers or as stepfathers (see Smart and Neale, 1999a; Dowd, 2000; Marsiglio, 2003). For Finch and Mason (1993), responsibilities for caring and making commitments are not 'natural', they are developed over time and depend on how things are worked out between people through negotiation. These negotiated commitments suggest there is no clear mandate of permanent commitment. As Finch and Mason (1993) posit, 'The concept of commitment is a fruitful way of conceptualising family responsibilities. The process of negotiating these responsibilities is one through which commitments develop and emerge' (Finch and Mason, 1991: 93).

Fathers' commitments to children are not unconditional but contingent on the maintenance of a relationship with the child's mother (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1993; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1997). Stepfathers negotiate, formally

or informally, their involvement with their stepchildren's mothers (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Marsiglio et al., 2000), who decide whether, when and to what extent interested stepfathers become involved with stepchildren in various activities such as feeding, clothing, bathing or disciplining (Marsiglio, 2004).

1.10.1 Generative fathering

Snarey (1993) shifted the focus away from fathers' role occupancy and on to the significance of fathers' involvement with children in their care. The study questioned the essentially gendered debate on fathering¹¹ by developing Erikson's (1963) concept of 'generative fathering', a process of reaching out beyond the self to nurture the next generation. Snarey (1993) posits that being involved in some form of care for others is good for men, good for those in their care, and for the community of which they are part (the latter element is beyond the scope of this study).

This shift in the focus of research regarding fathers' involvement with children appears to have moved beyond 'the previous discourse of dichotomies' (Dienhart, 1998: 31), for example, father absence or presence, good or bad fathering, or comparing fathers' experiences with mothers' experiences of parenting.

Subsequently Dollahite and colleagues, sought to expand the work of Snarey and Erikson and used a fathers' nurturing lens through which they could develop

¹¹ I do not dispute the conclusions of other researchers which confirm that although fathers are encouraged to be, and often are, involved in care activities, the gendered role theory of parental involvement where a 'provider' role dominates the shaping of men's fathering identities, persists (Warin et al., 1999). Russell concluded 'the mother still retains the greater responsibility for child management and socialization and performs more child-care tasks than the father' (1999: 62).

an understanding of how men could 'expand their abilities as caregivers and find validation through the rewards of parenting' (Dollahite et al., 1996: 353). They identified several 'critical dimensions of good fathering', which represent 'responsibilities of generative fathering' (Dollahite et al., 1996: 356). Key among these 'dimensions', and of particular importance for this study, are: commitment to children; forming lasting attachments with children and children's mothers; making choices that meet children's needs; contributing to others' needs often in an altruistic way; relating to children through shared meanings; caring for children; and adapting to the changing needs of children as they grow. Thus 'generative fathering' is defined as having an interest in establishing and guiding the next generation, and as such it 'is rooted in ethics and care' (Dowd, 2000: 166). For Dowd, generative fathering or 'nurture' encompasses both qualitative and quantitative aspects, that is, how much men do with children and what men do for children, practised co-operatively with other caretakers, and represents,

care - physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, - gauged by one's conduct and the consequences for children of positive development. It is responsive to the different needs of children at different ages. Thus nurture is not a static conception. It means more than simply doing; it also means the manner in which things are done (Dowd, 2000: 176).

A plurality of masculinities and a less gendered focus on parenting provide an opportunity to extend the concept of nurture from biological fathering to stepfathering.

1.10.2 Fatherhood and care

The core values associated with an ethics of care were defined by Tronto (1993) as attentiveness to the need for care, responsiveness, competence and

willingness to accept responsibility for others and for the results of one's actions. Responsibility for and commitment to children are regarded as key elements of parenting (Allan and Crow, 2001), and have foundations in 'sensitive activity' and 'active sensitivity', where the practical activities of care and the orientations to care coincide (Mason, 1996).

Marsiglio and colleagues defined a key element of paternal involvement as 'the extent to which the parent takes ultimate responsibility for the child's welfare and care' (Marsiglio et al., 2000: 277). Responsibility is defined as providing economic support for the family, emotional support for partners and direct interaction with children (Marsiglio et al, 2000). Thus, responsibility focuses on the adult who is accountable for a child's day-to-day care and welfare within the context of the family (Lamb et al., 1987b; van Dongen, 1995). Through taking on responsibilities, people shape the course of their commitments (Finch and Mason, 1990). Clarke and O'Brien (2002) concluded that taking responsibility for children was an important aspect of fathering that was of psychological, sociological and social policy interest, yet remained under-researched.

Paternal roles can be assessed through men's commitment towards their children (Fox and Bruce, 1999), where commitment is defined as the strength of a relationship to others while in a particular role (Stryker, 1968). Commitment to a particular role may be demonstrated by electing to participate in various activities, and role salience is influenced through a commitment to an identity (Daly, 1993); for the parenting role, this is likely to involve interaction with children (Minton and Pasley, 1996).

Commitment can be regarded as 'interactional', relating to the extent of one's social relationships, or 'affective', which refers to the intensiveness of those social relationships. The more intense one's emotional ties are to one's social

network with respect to a particular role, the more committed an individual will be to their role identity (Stryker, 1968). The more central a father-role identity is, the greater the father's involvement in child-related activities (Stryker and Serpe, 1994). According to Fox and Bruce (2001), commitment is generally understood in terms of involvement and associated investment of resources that relate to an identity. Dollahite and colleagues indicated that in making commitments fathers were making statements about dependability and reliability, they were taking a long-term view of the future and giving an indication of the development or existence of ties 'in a relationship of obligation to a child' (Dollahite et al., 1996: 356).

Although Giddens (1992) cautions that commitment without reservation risks pain and hurt in the future should relationships be dissolved, research suggests that commitment is a desirable attribute in a long-term partner for both sexes. Therefore, identifying and conveying the cues which can reliably forecast or demonstrate commitment is a valuable asset in partner selection (Buss and Schmitt, 1993).

Commitment to and responsibility for children are key attributes of a concept of care and of nurturant fathering. Adopting a framework of care may be of value in understanding the ways in which stepfathers become differentially involved with their stepchildren.

Previous researchers (see for example Burgoyne and Clark, 1982) have identified parallels between fatherhood and stepfatherhood and suggested that a good fatherhood model can be used as a framework within which stepfatherhood can be examined. However, Burgoyne and Clark also cautioned that, 'Such an approach is predicated on the assumption that "fathering" is in itself an understood and, typically, non-problematic activity' (Burgoyne and Clark,

1982: 197). Increasing levels of divorce, separation, cohabitation, and lone motherhood (Bumpass et al., 1991) suggest a diversity of fatherhood practices. And as Fox and Bruce (2001) indicate, fathering - and what fathering means to men - is complex in that not all fathers are, or are willing to take responsibilities or make commitments in the same ways.

1.11 Stepfatherhood research

Although stepfamilies have become more socially prominent, research has revealed little about the actual levels of involvement stepfathers have with their stepchildren, little about the types of parenting that stepfathers are involved in, and little about their involvement in discipline and control of children (Mason et al, 2002). Several representative studies of stepfamilies have concluded that stepfathers are largely marginal figures, particularly with regard to stepchildren and wider (step)kin (see for example, Duberman, 1975; Perkins and Kahan, 1979; Ferri, 1984; Furstenberg, 1987; Hetherington, 1993; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Some notable exceptions among the more recent studies, however, have listened to stepfathers and suggested they can and do have a more effective role in their stepfamilies (see for examples, Smith et al., 2001; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003). Although stepfathers have contributed to the above studies through responding to questionnaires and participating in interviews, they have not been the primary focus. An exception is Robertson (2004), who, in the context of the study by Smith et al (2001), investigated stepfathers' participation in general childcare and housework activities, and the relationship of participation in these activities to stepfather-stepchild relations.

This section will review the extent of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren and identify some of the factors that limit, or constrain those stepfathers who

seek greater involvement. The potential for stepfathers to draw upon resources and to negotiate greater involvement will also be considered.

1.12 Stepfathers' involvement in the care of children

Hetherington and Jodl (1994) suggested that the range of challenges faced by stepfathers made stepfathering a unique activity. Recent research with stepchildren found that stepfathers had to 'earn' their place within stepfamilies through becoming active members of their stepchildren's lives. Merely being present was not sufficient; stepfathers had to demonstrate they cared for stepchildren (Brannen et al., 2000). This achieved status may be obtained through stepfathers' involvement with a range of 'parenting' activities: acting as primary care givers, assisting with everyday tasks, helping with stepchildren's homework and transporting stepchildren to and from their various activities.

Many stepfathers consider themselves to be parental figures in their stepfamilies and seek to be involved in parenting and contributing to the support of stepchildren with their partners (Ganong et al., 1995). Ahrons and Wallish (1987) have shown that many stepfathers' partners want them to be involved in 'parenting' activities.

A number of studies have compared stepfathers' and first-marriage fathers' involvement, and have produced contradictory findings. Several studies found that stepfathers appeared to be less involved than first-marriage fathers (Hetherington, 1987; Bray, 1988; Popenoe, 1994; White, 1994a). Stepfathers reported less involvement in activities and engaged in fewer positive interactions with their stepchildren than fathers in first-marriage families (Thompson et al., 1992). Other studies indicated that the majority of stepfathers were as involved as first-marriage fathers across a number of activities (Hetherington and

Clingempeel, 1992; Gorrel Barnes et al., 1997). Ferri and Smith (1998) concluded that 'stepfathers appeared to be as involved in the care of stepchildren as fathers in first families were in looking after own sons and daughters' (Ferri and Smith, 1998: 36). Mason and colleagues, in a recent study, confirmed that stepfathers acted as primary care givers, assisted with everyday family tasks and helped stepchildren in much the same way as first-marriage fathers (Mason et al., 2002).

Research has identified various factors that are important in determining the level of stepfathers' involvement. For example, cohabiting stepfathers were likely to be less involved with stepchildren than married stepfathers (Brooks-Gunn, 1994; Hofferth and Anderson, 2003). This may be partially due to cohabiting stepfamilies living in more disadvantaged socio-economic settings than married stepfamilies. It may also be that cohabitation signals 'a lower commitment than remarriage, leading to lower investments in family relationships' (Thompson, 1994: 95). Stepfathers' own experiences of leaving home early, having a series of cohabiting relationships or frequent negative events, were found to be linked to their expression of warmth and affection towards their stepchildren. Where these experiences were fewer, stepparent-child relationships within the family were more affectionate (Dunn et al., 2000).

Stepfathers in recently formed stepfamilies were found to have a relatively low level of involvement in the early stages of stepfamily development (Bray and Berger, 1993b). Stepfathers may become more involved as stepfamilies become more established. This may reflect the increasing stability of the stepfamily after the disrupting experiences of transitions to lone parenthood, and then to re-partnering (Hetherington, 1991; Bray and Berger, 1993a). However, even after a period of time, some stepfathers' attempts to become involved are likely to be rejected by stepchildren, and stepfathers' parenting will

remain distant and disengaged (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Hetherington et al., 1998).

Stepfathers are less likely to be involved with adolescent stepchildren than with younger stepchildren. Adolescent stepchildren perceive stepfamilies to be less cohesive (Bray, 1988) and report less closeness to step-parents than children in first-marriage families (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Adolescent children may have experienced more autonomy and responsibility living as part of lone-parent families prior to stepfamily formation, and they may place less importance on developing warm relationships with stepfathers compared to younger children (Barber and Lyons, 1994; see also for a review, Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

White and Gilbreth (2001) summarised the experience of many stepfathers:

Regardless of the good intentions with which they entered the stepparenting role, many stepfathers experience sufficient rebuffs from the children and sometimes their spouse that they eventually withdraw to the role of chauffeur, bankroller and handyman, eschewing any attempts at authoritative parenting (White and Gilbreth, 2001: 156).

Biological fathering of children, and living with them until they reach adulthood, remains the norm and provides 'the clearest cultural scripts to guide behaviour and expectations' (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001: 384). Stepfathers cannot rely on these generally accepted norms (Robinson, 1991; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). Stepfathers 'have been issued only a limited licence to parent' (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991: 85). Fine and colleagues concluded that there was 'no consensus among step-parents, parents and stepchildren about how the step-parent should and does function' (Fine et al, 1998: 823). And Beck (1994) suggested that as stepfathers had no script to follow that could

be located within fatherhood, they had to create their own individual biographies.

1.12.1 Sensitivity to stepchildren's needs

Developing an understanding of stepfathers' emotional care for stepchildren, having regard for and making choices that prioritise stepchildren's needs can be aided by drawing on Mason's (1996) concept of sentient activity and Dollahite and colleagues' (1996) concepts of making choices that meet children's needs, contributing to others' needs often in an altruistic way, and adapting to children's changing needs as they grow. A degree of sensitivity has long been regarded as a requirement of those involved in stepfamilies. When this was evident, stepfamilies were found to be less problematic (Burgoyne and Clarke, 1984). The concept of sensitivity to stepchildren's needs is less about children's day-to-day care than about having regard for stepchildren's long-term well being, and for developing relations between stepfathers and stepchildren.

1.12.2 Stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control

Involvement with discipline and control is an indicator of fathers' and stepfathers' responsibilities for children in their care (Lamb et al. (1987b; Ferri and Smith, 1996; 1998), however, there are outcome differences for stepfathers and fathers.

Stepfathers are often uncertain about the level of involvement they should have with stepchildren, and this is particularly the case with regard to discipline and control (Cherlin, 1978; Marsh, 1987). The extent of this uncertainty may be gauged by recent findings that this issue was discussed in the majority of stepfamilies between step-parents and parents (Smith et al., 2001).

Hetherington et al. (1992) found that when stepfathers were involved in discipline and control, this could lead to poorer stepfather-stepchild relations, to stepchildren rejecting stepfathers' authority (White and Gilbreth, 2001), especially when stepchildren were adolescent, and to increased conflict in stepfamilies. Research has indicated that the quality of stepfather-stepchild relations was improved where stepfathers did not try to take over the family system into which they had arrived (Hetherington et al., 1982; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991); acknowledged that children's mothers had primary child-rearing responsibilities (Hetherington et al., 1982; 1988; Bray, 1988; Hetherington, 1989; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999), and were the main decision-makers on matters of discipline; and did not initially take responsibility for discipline decisions, but took a secondary, supportive role to children's mothers (Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Bray and Berger, 1993a; Smith et al., 2001). Stepfathers' involvement may develop through a process of providing advice and enforcing disciplinary decisions and rules in a supplementary role to children's mothers (Mason, et al., 2002).

These findings differ from research findings relating to biological fathers (co-resident and non-resident). Biological fathers' involvement with a moderate level of control and supervision in which they take and enforce disciplinary decisions, is associated with appropriate child development and leads to beneficial outcomes in terms of children's well being (Fine and Kurdek, 1992; Amato and Rivera, 1999), as well as competence and mental health (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Amato and Rezac (1994) provide a review and summary of these data.

However, in circumstances where children's mothers support and encourage stepfathers to have a disciplinary role, stepfathers can be involved with

discipline and control of stepchildren (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Furthermore, when stepfathers perceived that they were involved with discipline and control, they were 'more satisfied with a number of dimensions of their marital and family lives' (Fine et al., 1997: 519).

1.12.3 Non-resident fathers' contact with children and its implications for stepfathers

It is estimated that, in the UK, sixteen percent of fathers do not co-reside with some or all of their children (Clarke, 1997). The current structure of UK legislation encourages the continued involvement of non-resident fathers with their children. The introduction of the Children Act (1989), implemented in 1991, holds that divorced, non-resident biological fathers retain full parental responsibility¹² with respect to their children.

Studies indicated that many non-resident fathers lost contact with their children after a short period of time (Furstenberg, 1988; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; Bray and Berger, 1993b). In addition, the length of time fathers had been non-resident was negatively associated with the frequency of contact they had with their children (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Selzer, 1991). A number of factors have been identified that can reduce the frequency of non-resident father-child contact, for example, geographical separation¹³ (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Seltzer, 1991; Bradshaw et. al., 1999); new relationships (Seltzer, 1991); and

¹² Only persons with parental responsibility (PR) have the right to make decisions about a child's upbringing. All mothers automatically have PR, as do all married biological fathers. Unmarried biological fathers do not, unless they register the birth jointly with the mother (for births after 1/12/2003), re-register the birth, or apply for PR (a) where both parents agree, by registering their agreement with a court (Parental Authority Agreement) or (b) where the mother does not agree, the father may make an application to a court (Parental Responsibility Order).

¹³ Average distance between non-resident parents and children in the UK is 23.6 miles; 76% live within 12.4 miles (Child Support Agency, 2001).

remarriage (Amato and Rezac, 1994; Hendrickson Christensen and Rettig, 1995; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

More recent research indicates a trend towards increased non-resident fathers' contact with their children (Selzer and Brandreth, 1994; Amato and Gilbreth, 1999, Bradshaw et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 2002). Factors identified as having an enhancing effect on non-resident father-child contact are non-resident fathers' occupational status and level of income, meeting financial obligations to children (Seltzer, 1994; Lamb et al., 1999), maintaining non-conflicting relations with former spouses (Dunn et al., 1998; Dowd, 2000; Trinder et al., 2002), and the establishment of a visiting schedule and a family routine that includes overnight stays (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992).

However, research evidence is equivocal on the benefits for the children, of non-resident fathers' continued involvement. Amato and Gilbreth's (1999) meta-analysis of non-resident father studies found mixed results. Many studies found that contact between non-resident fathers and children had either negative or no association with children's well being. Many of these studies used frequency of non-resident father-child contact as an indicator of the general quality of father-child relationship, which Amato and Gilbreth argue is 'a poor proxy for general relationship quality' (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999: 559).

Lamb (1987) observes that biological fathers' increased experience of child-care and commitment to the role of father were key factors of competent parenting. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) suggest that competent biological fathers with appropriate parenting skills, for example setting boundaries, providing support and encouragement, and dispensing discipline when necessary, may remain committed to the role of father when they become non-resident. Smith (2004)

suggests that the father-child relationship prior to separation or divorce 'may determine the frequency and pattern of contact after separation, and may be more important than frequency of current contact in shaping the quality of children's subsequent relationships with their fathers' (Smith, 2004: 35).

When non-resident fathers meet their financial obligations, this has been shown to benefit children in terms of educational achievement (Lamb et al., 1999) and their mental well being (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999). The majority of non-resident parents (72%) make child support payments (CSA, 2001)¹⁴. Similarly, in the US, most children of divorced parents receive some financial support from non-resident fathers, although the majority receive less than the financial cost of raising children (Lamb et al., 1999). Non-resident fathers are more likely to meet and in many cases exceed their financial obligations to their children in situations where co-parenting arrangements exist (Selzer 1994b), or where they live in households with new partners and they contribute a higher proportion of household income (Ermisch and Pronzato, 2006). Whilst these data refer to all divorced parents, the situation may be different for stepfamilies where non-resident fathers may be less willing to provide financial support when there is another 'breadwinner' in residence.

After separation or divorce, co-parenting relationships which are co-operative, mutually supportive, and non-confrontational are advantageous for parents and children (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992), and can lead to improved outcomes for children (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999) and better adaptation in remarried families (Bray and Berger, 1993b). Post-divorce relationships that start out as co-operative are more likely to remain so, compared to those that start out as conflicted (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992; Trinder et al., 2002). However, the

¹⁴ Approximately half of non-resident fathers in the United States pay child support and the average level of child support is estimated at approximately \$60 per week (Thompson and Laible, 1999; Manning and Smock, 2000).

majority of co-parenting arrangements are likely to deteriorate over time (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992), and co-operative co-parenting remains relatively uncommon (Sobolewski and King, 2005). Although in a recent study of post-divorce contact, Trinder and colleagues found that slightly less than half of their sample had contact arrangements they classified as 'working' (Trinder et al., 2002).

Furstenberg and Nord (1985) observed that frequency of contact between non-resident fathers and their children does not adversely affect stepfather-stepchild relationships, and posited that children may benefit from the involvement of both non-resident fathers and stepfathers. Recent findings suggest that contact between non-resident fathers and children did not reduce the potential for stepfathers to have good relationships with their stepchildren (Hofferth and Anderson, 2003). And good relationships with both biological fathers and stepfathers are associated with better child outcomes (White and Gilbreth, 2001; Smith, 2004).

However, the increasing likelihood of non-resident fathers remaining in contact with and being involved with their children adds to the complexity of stepfathering (Fine and Fine, 1992) and may have implications for stepfathers and the formation of stable stepfamilies (Smart and Neale, 1999a). Involved non-resident fathers may cast doubts in the minds of stepfathers over the need for them to develop a parenting role in stepfamilies (Fine, 1995; see also MacDonald and DeMaris, 2002). Marisglio (1992) suggested that increased involvement of non-resident fathers left stepfathers no clearer about their roles today than they were when Cherlin (1978) conceptualised the role of the stepparent as 'incompletely institutionalised'.

1.12.4 Stepfathers' own children and implications for stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren

Previous research findings have indicated that the presence of stepfathers' own children from previous relationships can be a factor that further complicates stepfather-stepchild relationship development. Several studies established that where stepfathers' own children from previous relationships were non-resident, stepfathers appeared to transfer their 'parental investment' to the children in their new household, and were more involved with their stepchildren than with their own children (Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1987; Furstenberg, 1988; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Etzioni, 1993; Popenoe, 1994; White, 1994b). Where stepfathers' own children were co-resident, stepfathers were more likely to behave preferentially towards their own children over their stepchildren (Marsiglio, 1992; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). However, Ganong and Coleman found that stepfathers with co-resident children 'feel more companionship with their stepchildren, experience more intimate stepfather-stepchild interactions, are more involved with their stepchildren's friends, feel fewer negative feelings about stepchildren and have fewer desires to escape' (Ganong and Coleman, 1994: 83).

Stepfathers becoming fathers for a first or subsequent time is not uncommon in stepfamilies. Approximately half of remarried or cohabiting couples, where one or other of the adults already has one or more children from previous relationships, will experience the birth of a child (Wineberg, 1990). The literature remains unclear, however, as to the effects these births have in terms of stepfamily relations. Several studies indicated that the birth of subsequent children was beneficial. For example, Burgoyne and Clark (1984) regarded the birth of an additional child as symbolising stepfamilies' intentions to settle down. Ambert (1986) found that it led to improved marital relations and improved stepfather-stepchild relations, or contributed to stepfamily integration (Coleman and Ganong, 1990; Wineberg, 1992). More recent research has differed; Bray

and Berger (1993b) and Stewart (2002) found no evidence to suggest that stepfamily integration was aided by the birth of an additional child, whilst Ferri and Smith (1998) found evidence that the birth of an additional child resulted in a reduction in reported marital quality.

MacDonald and DeMaris (1996) reported differences in stepfathers' satisfaction levels when the birth of a child was the stepfathers' first child. Manning and Smock (2000) found that upon the birth of a subsequent child, stepfathers who were already fathers to children from previous relationships tended to transfer their focus to the stephousehold. This change may be partially attributable to stepfathers' focusing their attention on the need for parental care of an infant or younger child compared to the needs of older children.

1.12.5 Stepfathers' spousal relationship satisfaction

Marital satisfaction appears to decrease over time within both first (Orbuch et al., 1996) and subsequent marriages (Guisinger et al., 1989), and to be lower for cohabiting couples than for married couples (see Smock, 2000 for a review of studies that provide consistent findings). Few differences were found in reported satisfaction between first and subsequent marriages (White and Booth, 1985; Anderson and White, 1986; Coleman and Ganong, 1990). Skinner et al. (2002) found there was nothing to distinguish between levels of couples' satisfaction with marital quality between those who cohabit and later marry and those who married without first cohabiting; and those who remarried and had not cohabited with married couples who had not cohabited. Women with less traditional views regarding gender roles were found to be less happy with their marriages. However, where husbands supported greater role sharing and gender equality, there was less stress in marriages (Amato and Booth, 1995). Where remarriages contained stepchildren, lower scores for perceived quality of

family life rather than marital satisfaction were recorded (White and Booth, 1985; Peek et al., 1988).

Stepfathers' satisfaction with the quality of their relationship with their partners has been found to be associated with the types of relationship developed between stepfathers and stepchildren (Kurdek and Fine, 1991; Fine et al., 1997); they are 'affectively linked because these relationships begin and develop simultaneously' (Fine and Kurdek, 1995: 221). Mutually supportive stepfather-stepchild relationships were found to improve stepfathers' reported satisfaction with their partners (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Visher and Visher, 1988). The 'cycle of positive behaviour' suggests that where stepfathers were involved with their stepchildren, they in turn received positive encouragement from their partners and were thus encouraged to remain involved with their stepchildren (Brand et al., 1988).

1.13 Stepfathers' negotiated care for stepchildren

The lack of certainty that stepfathers experience about the ways in which they can become involved with stepchildren, suggests that the nature of the stepfather-stepchild relationship must be negotiated (Cherlin, 1978; White and Booth, 1985). The process of negotiation of the social meaning of shared activities leads to the development of a sense of shared understanding of what each individual expects of another (Finch, 1989). Marsiglio (1992) identified contextual and relational aspects of parenting that impacted upon those stepfathers who sought involvement in parenting stepchildren. These were shaped by a number of factors, such as the wishes of stepfathers, their partners, and stepchildren, by non-resident fathers' contact and by the length of time stepfathers had been co-resident.

The ambiguity of stepfathers' roles can be expressed for some stepfathers by their involvement in certain day-to-day stepfamily activities whilst at the same time keeping or being kept at a distance from involvement in other activities. Stepfathers enter established family units with little shared knowledge or understanding of disparate family histories, traditions or established practices, and may have to 'negotiate a new workable model of the family' (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999: 139). Allan and Crow (2001) regarded the development of stepfathers' involvement in terms of a 'social process' that may include stepfathers negotiating their involvement with other members of the stepfamily. Finch and Mason, in their examination of material and emotional support between adult kin, theorised that negotiation was a key feature of familial obligations and formed a basis for 'how commitments between kin are forged' (Finch and Mason, 1993: 93). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Weeks et al. (2001) contend that the continuation of social relationships and the creation of identities are dependent upon negotiation of commitment.

Negotiation is a process of working out or arriving at a social meaning of shared activities, and thus of what each individual expects of another (Finch, 1989). Individuals may feel they have more choice regarding obligations to step-kin than to biological kin (Ganong et al., 1999). Several researchers have suggested that children's mothers decide whether, when and to what extent those stepfathers who are interested become involved with stepchildren in various activities, for example feeding, clothing, bathing or disciplining (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Marsiglio, 2004); mothers act as 'gatekeepers' to involvement with children in stepfather families (Dowd, 2000). To add complexity to this situation, some stepfathers may also have to negotiate their involvement with other stepfamily members, for example stepchildren, non-resident fathers, and possibly their own co-resident or non-resident children.

Although it would appear that making commitments to and taking responsibilities for stepchildren are key attributes of stepfathering in much the same way as they are for biological fathering, there remain a number of factors that apply to stepfathers which appear not to apply to biological fathers. There remains a lack of clarity for many stepfathers in the expression of these aspects of parenting (White, 1994a), in particular where stepchildren's discipline and control are concerned. It would also appear that negotiation of these aspects of parenting has more prominence in stepfather families than is the case in first-marriage families. Stepfathers may experience reluctance on the part of their partners to negotiate their involvement with stepchildren where their partners have previously experienced the failure of adult relationships and where they perceive adult relationships to be transitory (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Stepfathers may also find it more challenging to be involved in joint activities when stepchildren were older when stepfathers first arrived, in more recently formed stepfamilies, where non-resident fathers maintain contact, or where stepfathers have children of their own.

1.14 Chapter summary

Social, demographic and structural changes through increases in divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and the birth of children outside marriage have resulted in changes to family formation, so that living as part of a stepfamily should no longer be considered a non-normative event (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Furthermore, it is appropriate to begin to 'question the doctrine that only the nuclear family can provide a truly appropriate setting for socialisation' (Furstenberg, 1988: 245). Although stepfathers may be involved in many aspects of fathering experienced by biological co-resident fathers, they are also likely to experience a number of challenges that are unique to stepfathering that are not experienced by biological fathers. These can result in difficult

stepfather-stepchild relations, and stepfathers may be uncertain about the parenting role they can or should have in their stepfamilies. This may necessitate stepfathers' negotiating with their partners any involvement with stepchildren.

As families become less defined by structures and more defined by their active processes (Morgan, 1999), there are suggestions that masculinities are being redefined (Dowd, 2000) and fatherhood renegotiated (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Men are capable of occupying a diversity of father roles (Lamb, 1998), and fatherhood can be practiced across household boundaries and blood relations (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001). According to Cherlin and Furstenberg (1994), parenthood should be as much about achievement as it is about ascription.

Several theorists such as Snarey (1993); Dollahite et al. (1996); and Lamb (1999) regard contemporary fathering as having moved beyond structural, gender-confined definitions. They contend that an 'emergent' model of nurturant fathering is available to biological fathers and potentially available to social fathers. According to Dowd (2000), the concept of nurturant fathering has origins in an 'ethic of care', the key attributes of which are 'caring for' and 'caring about' others, with a focus on identifying and meeting others' needs (Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

Although the concept of care is more strongly associated with mothering than fathering, by drawing upon a care framework it may be possible to further bridge the traditional gender divide in parenting and to focus more on parenting as a process of caring for the next generation, practiced by adults who need not always be biologically related to the children in their care.

Key elements of competent and involved parenting have been identified as commitment and responsibility. Lamb (1987) contends that men must have a strong commitment to their role as fathers; commitment was defined by Stryker (1968) as the strength of a relationship to others while in a particular role. A key element of paternal involvement is taking responsibility for children's welfare in terms of providing economic and emotional support, and for direct interaction with children (Marsiglio et al., 2000). A third element that is integral to Dollahite and colleagues' (1996) framework of nurturant fathering can be summarised as 'being sensitive to children's needs'. There are clear theoretical links between the key concepts of a care framework and the concepts contained within a framework of nurturant fathering which permit social fathering to be examined using a lens based upon a framework of nurture and care. Although these theoretical concepts have been developed to examine contemporary fathering, they have not been applied to the parenting conducted by stepfathers, and there may be methodological difficulties in seeking to apply them to stepfathering.

1.15 Conclusion to Literature Review

Within this chapter I have reviewed the relevant literature pertaining to stepfamilies, fatherhood and stepfathers. I have defined what constitutes a stepfamily, and for the purposes of this study, identified three sub-categories that provide an indication of stepfamily complexity based on stepfathers' histories: 'simple', 'simple-plus' and 'complex' stepfamilies. I have referred to the considerable body of stepfamily research that has been conducted within a deficit model, which highlighted the weaknesses of stepfamilies when compared to first-marriage families. I have demonstrated that this has largely been replaced by the normative/adaptive perspective, which offers researchers the opportunity to conceptualise contemporary stepfamily living as a process of change and permits comparisons to be drawn between stepfamilies. What has

emerged from this research perspective is an indication of 'risks confronted during the period of transition' and 'of the resiliency as the family restabilises' (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999: 138).

The literature review identified several themes related to stepfathers' involvement about which there remained either a lack of clarity or ambiguity in the findings. Gorrel Barnes et al. (1997) found that many stepfathers were involved with their stepfamilies, while Ferri and Smith (1998) found that some stepfathers sought greater involvement with their stepchildren than had been previously identified. However, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found that conflict within stepfamilies, in some cases due to stepfathers' involvement, resulted in many stepfathers either becoming or remaining distant. Involvement in joint activities by stepfathers and stepchildren has been identified as being associated with the development of stepfather-stepchild relationships (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Ganong et al., 1999). However, as Robertson concluded stepfathers' involvement in activities with stepchildren 'is both a function of the quality of their relationship and an influence on its development' (Robertson, 2004: 245).

In reviewing a selection of relevant fatherhood and stepfatherhood literature I have identified differences between fathers and stepfathers with regard to the ways in which they are involved with children/stepchildren. I have highlighted a number of factors that can have an impact on stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren, which are not present where biological fathers' involvement with their own children is concerned. Although the findings were not always consistent, these factors included stepfathers' prior experience of fathering, stepfathers' own children from their previous or current relationships, and continued contact from children's non-resident fathers (Marsiglio, 1992).

Essentially, stepfathers experience role ambiguity (Cherlin, 1978; White and Booth, 1985), and this has been highlighted by their uncertainty with regard to their involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control. Biological fathers, whether co-resident or non-resident, are encouraged to be involved with children's discipline and control, and when they are, they experience better relations with their children than biological fathers who were less involved (Fine and Kurdek, 1992; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). However, stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren's discipline and control could result in stepchildren's disengagement (Hetherington et al., 1998). Although where stepfathers' involvement was supported by and supportive of their partners, it was possible for stepfathers to be involved in discipline and control of stepchildren (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

The literature highlighted the centrality of mothers in managing the involvement of biological fathers, in particular non-resident fathers, with their children (Smart and Neale, 1999a) and of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren (Dowd, 2000; Marsiglio, 2004). This suggested that stepfathers' negotiation with their stepchildren's mothers may be a central feature of their involvement with stepchildren in terms of both care and control.

I have also referred to key elements from within the concept of care (Tronto, 1993), particularly, commitment, responsibility and sensitivity. These sub-concepts are closely linked to the work of several prominent fatherhood researchers (see for examples, Dollahite et al., 1996; Lamb, 1999; Dowd, 2000) who have shifted the focus on fathers' parenting from a traditionally gendered approach to one where fathers can be regarded as nurturers of the children in their care. The term 'fathering' has been used to describe the activities of biological fathers who are involved in the care of their own children. Fathering has also been extended theoretically to describe the activities of men who care

for children they are not related to, notably, stepfathers (Lamb, 1999; Dollahite et al., 1996; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Drawing on the concept of 'generative fathering', and the sub-concepts of care, commitment to others, responsibility for others, and sensitivity to stepchildren's needs would prove useful in developing an understanding of the process of stepfathers' explicitly or implicitly negotiated roles in stepfamilies, and the ways in which stepfathers develop their notions of stepfathering.

The literature review has raised a number of questions that have yet to be adequately answered. The review indicated that competent and involved parenting rests upon strong commitment to a role, yet the role of stepfather is often ambiguous. It is not clear in what ways stepfathers can make commitments to, or take responsibilities for stepchildren, when their involvement can lead to conflict within stepfamilies. What factors lead to differential stepfather involvement, and what implications does this have for stepfathers? There remains a lack of clarity surrounding the factors that resource or constrain stepfathers' involvement. Whilst the literature indicates that children's mothers play a central role in supporting stepfathers' involvement, it is not clear to what extent stepfathers' involvement in care, and discipline and control activities, is discussed, or negotiated with their partners. Non-resident fathers have been encouraged through legislative and social changes to remain in contact with their children. It is not clear what the impact of this has been for stepfathers in terms of resourcing or constraining their involvement.

Although it has been suggested that a less gendered approach to parenting is beneficial to fathers, it is not clear whether the attributes of a 'nurturant fathering' model can be identified in the parenting that stepfathers are involved with, or whether any of these are expressed to a greater or lesser degree in

different stepfamily settings. What are the attributes that can be identified that differentiate between men who choose to become more involved in stepfamilies from those who choose to be less involved?

Empirical research focusing on stepfathers' involvement in parenting, from the perspectives of stepfathers, is extremely limited. The goal of this study was to further the existing knowledge of stepfathers by addressing the questions raised in the review of literature, by drawing upon the accounts of stepfathers. The review of literature has led to the formulation of this thesis with the emphasis focused on the ways that stepfathers construct their notions of stepfathering in relation to the dominant discourses that have contributed to, facilitated or constrained, their understanding and experience of stepfathering.

Stepfathers are increasingly represented among contemporary families, yet the knowledge of stepfathering remains limited. Although recent research has shed some light on stepfathers, knowledge of the diversity of stepfathering and the ways in which stepfathers understand and interpret the meanings of stepfathering is still insufficient.

The complexities surrounding stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control led me to further question the applicability of a traditional fatherhood model as a means of investigating stepfatherhood. Following the suggestion of Santrock et al. (1988), I have examined stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control separately from their involvement in other practical activities. I have not sought to understand stepfathers' involvement with discipline and control in this study as an issue of power or authority of the 'father figure'. Rather I have sought to understand the process through which stepfathers negotiate with their partners, taking responsibility for discipline, how this relates to the development

of stepfathers' identities, and the ways in which stepfathers are accountable to stepchildren's mothers.

This thesis aims to further knowledge about the active processes of stepfathering and what this means to stepfathers in different stepfamily settings. Through a comparative analysis of stepfathers' accounts of their stepfathering, I have sought to identify and to understand why some stepfathers are more actively involved with their stepfamilies than others, and the ways in which this may shape their notions of stepfathering.

2 Aims and design of the research

2.1 Introduction

Within this chapter I will first describe the exploratory and pilot work that I conducted in order to clarify the design and methods for the study. As a result of this, the aims of the study and the research questions I sought to answer were defined, and these are described. I will then outline the research design, and methodology employed, including where relevant, the underlying theoretical approaches. I will describe the final measures used, as well as the procedure, in terms of sampling and the recruitment strategies employed, the methodology and conduct of the interviews, and the post interview process. Finally I will outline the plan for the data analysis.

The literature review indicated that stepfathers faced uncertainty surrounding the extent to which they became involved in a number of aspects of 'parenting' activities with stepchildren. This was of particular importance when approaching the design of this study, as some aspects of stepfathers' greater involvement with stepchildren, such as involvement with discipline and control, have been linked to poorer outcomes for stepfather-stepchild relations than in circumstances where stepfathers were less involved. However, these 'outcomes' have mostly been expressed in terms of what this has meant for stepchildren (see for examples, Elliot and Richards, 1991; Kiernan, 1992b; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994; Hetherington and Jodl, 1994). Although the challenges to developing strong stepfather-stepchild relationships are recognised, it is also recognised that stepfather-stepchild relations are an important factor in terms of successful stepfamily development (see

Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999), and will be the subject of examination within this thesis.

The traditional notion of two-parent first marriage families living within one household is being challenged by the growth in remarried or never-married adults and their children forming stepfamilies (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000). Thus, the ways in which step-parents, and in particular stepfathers, manage their relationships with stepchildren become more of a focal issue. Following the approach suggested by Marsiglio and Hutchinson when researching men and fertility, I sought to view 'individual men as active agents who play a major role in creating their own experience and self', and to 'focus on the ways men organise their self-perceptions and learn lessons through their personal and vicarious experiences' (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002: 13). Consistent with this approach, I sought stepfathers' accounts of how they became stepfathers, how their stepfathering developed, and the ways in which they perceived that their partners, stepchildren, stepchildren's non-resident fathers and their own children from previous relationships, impacted on their stepfathering.

LaRossa and Wolf's (1985) paper demonstrated the contributions of qualitative family research during the latter half of the twentieth century. The design of this study was guided by the literature that suggested that stepfamily research would benefit from qualitative studies with a focus on the circumstances of relationship formation in stepfamilies (see also, Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1994). Bryman (1992) stated that qualitative research is concerned with research from 'the point of view of the individuals being studied, the detailed elucidation of context, the sensitivity to process' (Bryman, 1992: 59). As this study was largely exploratory, I considered a qualitative approach would enable me to gather detailed information that related to stepfathers' practices and would provide an opportunity to explore the meanings that stepfathers attached to their

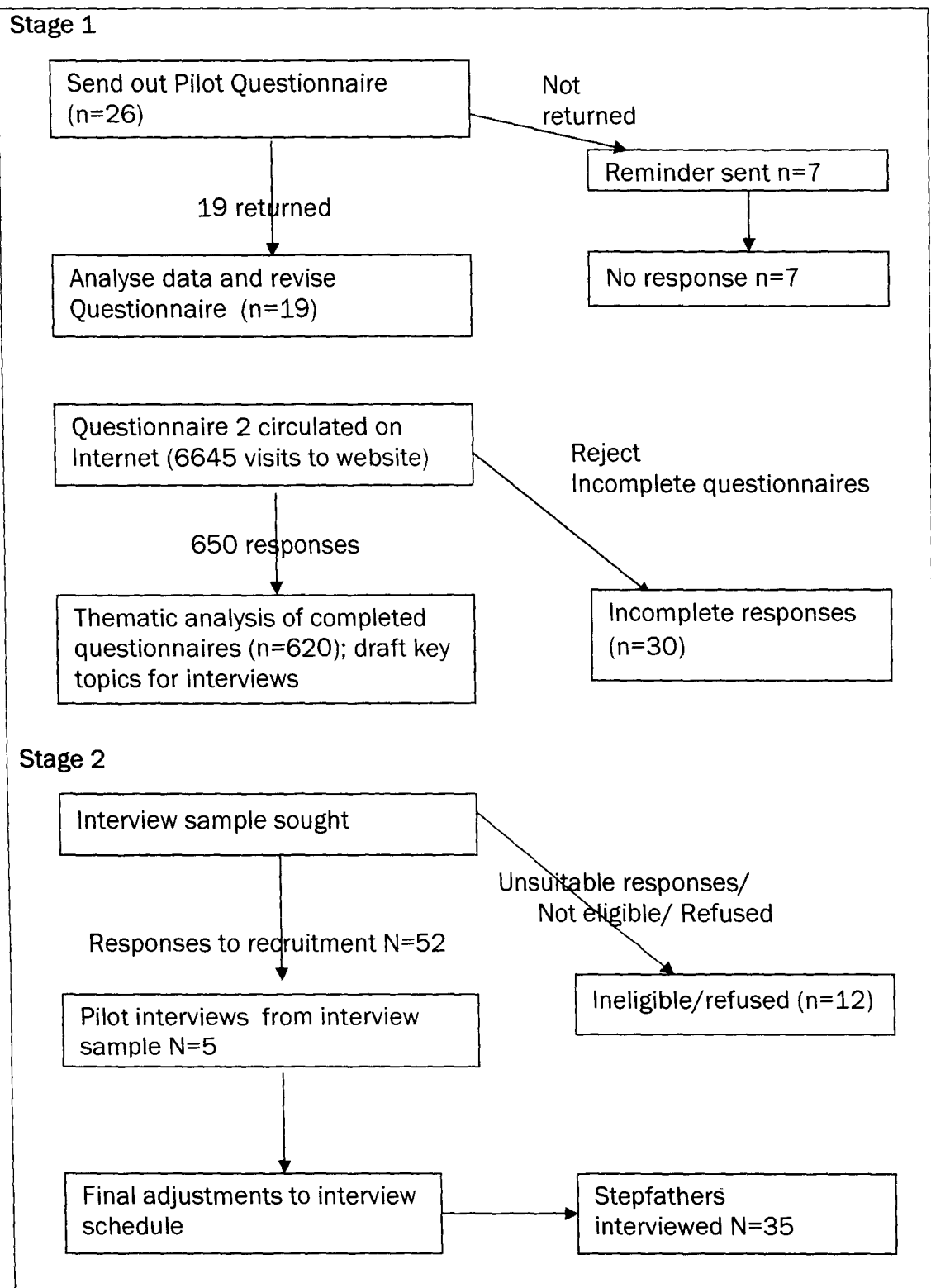
involvement. I anticipated that adopting this approach would enable me to provide answers to the research questions.

2.2 Pilot and exploratory work

The aims of piloting were to clarify the research questions, to assess how best to identify a sample of stepfathers, and to develop an appropriate methodology for the study. Piloting was conducted in two stages (see Figure 2). The first stage involved the development and testing of a questionnaire, and, building on information from this, the second stage involved the development of a draft interview schedule, which was then piloted with a small number of participants. The other major aim of pilot work was to explore how to identify a suitable sample for the research.

Initially, the piloting process involved mailing a hard-copy of the questionnaire to men who responded to a series of advertisements placed in local newspapers and magazines. Twenty-six questionnaires were sent out and nineteen were returned. The questionnaire was revised and refined in line with responses received, and the final version was used in the second and larger stage of pilot work described below. The final version of the questionnaire comprised fifty-four questions which covered six topic areas: 'current stepfamily and living arrangements; personal views about your stepfamily life; frequency of activities involving stepchildren and children; degree of involvement with stepchildren and children; financial arrangements and responsibilities; and a final section on demographic information (see Appendix I).

Figure 2: Two stage research design



2.3 Increasing questionnaire responses and reach

After the first small stage piloting it was clear that it would be important and informative to seek responses from a larger and more varied sample, even if this was not a wholly representative one. I turned to the internet, at this time a potentially new research tool in the field of social science research. Whilst the problems of obtaining a representative and meaningful sample from the internet are duly recognised, Coomber (1997), stated that it is important to explore the usefulness of this medium as a tool for gaining access to otherwise difficult-to-reach groups.

The internet appeared to offer the potential benefits of reaching a large population and gaining responses from stepfathers, in a similar manner to the traditional method of using a mail shot. It was necessary to recognize that whilst this method was largely untried (at the time), it had the advantage that it could provide a solution to the difficulties of reaching a hard to reach sample. The limitations were that it would exclude non-internet-using stepfathers, internet-using stepfathers who did not wish to respond, and the sample would be biased towards those internet-using stepfathers who had sought information on stepfathers or stepfamily matters. Furthermore, the sample would be of unknown representativeness; and from many different countries. This may not be an immediate disadvantage, but is at least a complication in terms of prevalence of stepfamilies; legislation; and differences in stigma and culture towards stepfathers. Although there are clearly challenges to using the internet for social science research purposes it can produce 'data suitable for exploratory analysis' (Fisher et al, 1996: 22).

A review of a number of previous studies suggested that the success rates of using the internet as a research tool was at best mixed (see for discussions; Tse et al., 1995; Coomber, 1997; Murray and Sixsmith, 1997). Other researchers reported positive outcomes using computer-based technology as a method of

data gathering claiming that it provided more honest responses and greater self-revelation than face-to-face interviewing in particular where sensitive issues were being discussed (Keisler and Sproull 1986; Motluk 1997; Buchanan and Smith, 1999), or when seeking to reach deviant groups (Coomber, 1997). Nesbary (1999) found web surveys compared favourably with mail surveys in terms of being more cost effective, and generating quicker, and greater responses. (See Appendix II, for ethical considerations of using electronic media in research.)

A website entitled 'Stepfather 2000' was developed to host the questionnaire. It was registered with several search engines, and was available on the worldwide web. It was available throughout 1999. During the period that the website was available, it received 6645 visits and resulted in 650 responses, of which 620 were fully completed questionnaires.

2.4 Pilot questionnaire analysis

The quantitative responses from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS and assisted with formulating my thinking with regard to honing the aspects of stepfathers' involvement that I sought to research further. The findings from the preliminary quantitative analysis have not been presented here as there were questions raised regarding the reliability and validity of data obtained from a sample recruited in this manner. However, the qualitative data have been analysed thematically and were used to inform the content of the interview schedule.

In addition to the demographic information and factual information about their situations, more than one-third of respondents provided some qualitative comment about being stepfathers (226/620), some were brief, others more detailed. These initial responses provided an early indication of questions that

were poorly constructed, or were less well understood by respondents. Many of the qualitative responses highlighted issues that were of particular concern to stepfathers, for example difficulties they experienced in developing good relationships with stepchildren, relationship difficulties with their partners, non-resident fathers' payment of child-support, and contact with non-resident fathers (see Appendix III for examples of these responses). These qualitative responses were collated thematically to provide an overview of issues that stepfathers regarded as important. This added to the knowledge I had gained from the literature review and assisted with finalising the design of the interview schedule (see Appendix IV).

From the pilot questionnaire I learned that stepfathers were in complex family relationships, there was a wide variation in the extent and nature of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren and in their stepfamilies extending from those who were uninvolved to those who were very fully involved. Stepfathers varied widely in the attitudes expressed about their desired role in the stepfamily; some expressed little or no desire for involvement, and others expressed a wish for greater involvement. Stepfathers identified the challenges they experienced in developing good stepfather-stepchild relations, and the frustrations they felt with regard to the continuing role of non-resident fathers in stepchildren's lives, and whether, or not, they were meeting their financial responsibilities. Where non-resident fathers did not meet their commitments to courts or promises to children, stepfathers would rather they were no longer on the scene. However, they recognised the rights that children had to see their non-resident fathers, and identified there were benefits that children could gain from maintaining contact with them, even if this was difficult for stepfathers to deal with.

Many stepfathers expressed discontent with their relationships with partners and thought that these relationships suffered as a result of the difficulties of living in a stepfamily. At the same time, many expressed love and affection for

their stepchildren, they wanted to do the best for them, and protect them from being hurt. Thus, some stepfathers appeared to respond to the needs of their stepchildren as a parent might, whilst others were more distant and seemed to relate to children more as a friend, or neighbour might.

The pilot exercise indicated that questionnaires could provide some valuable qualitative responses, which were useful in focusing on key issues that related to stepfathers in stepfamilies. However, in order to explore some of these complex issues further, a more qualitatively focused research method would be required. As this study was exploratory, the subject matter was complex, and I sought 'answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 4), this suggested that a qualitative method of research would be appropriate. Allan (1991) states that:

'Qualitative approaches can rightly be regarded as "exploratory". Their aim is to use informants' own understandings of events in analysing social settings. Rather than assume that world-views are already known, there is acknowledgement that much has to be learnt before the right questions can be posed, let alone answers found' (Allan, 1991: 180).

As the study was designed to investigate the meanings that stepfathers' attached to the ways in which they were involved in relation to their stepfamily lives and experiences, a sample of stepfathers was sought from roughly the Greater London area and the Home Counties that could be reached reasonably easily and who could be interviewed about their experiences of living in stepfamilies. I had achieved some limited success with promoting the pilot study through promotional articles in newspapers and I decided to begin here, although I would seek to use more newspapers, and to cover a wider geographical area. However, it was also clear that I would have to employ other methods such as personal contacts, or appeals in workplace or similar settings where men could be reached.

2.5 Aims of the study and specific questions to be addressed

Hammersley (2000) indicated that it is important to consider the variety of forms that social research can take before embarking on research. He distinguished between the aims of policy-oriented research and theoretical research. 'They involve different goals and different immediate audiences' (Hammersley, 2000: 225). Policy-oriented research aims to provide knowledge for action whilst theoretical research seeks the development of knowledge for understanding. Hammersley proposed a clear distinction between 'practical inquiry' where the 'immediate audience is practitioners and policy makers...as well as others who have a practical interest in the particular issue' and 'scientific inquiry' where 'the immediate audience is fellow researchers' (Hammersley, 2000: 227). Therefore, following Hammersley, this study was based on the approach referred to as 'scientific inquiry' and sought to contribute to a developing body of knowledge, where the immediate audience is fellow researchers and the aim is to provide descriptions and explanations of particular cases and phenomena that have arisen through the study of stepfathering.

The aims of the study were to develop knowledge and understanding of stepfathering by exploring the social processes of stepfathers' involvement with their stepfamilies, to examine comparatively stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren across different types of stepfamilies, and to identify factors that may impact upon stepfathers' experiences of involvement. Within a context of familial definitions and norms, I sought to uncover the ways the research participants constructed, negotiated, and assigned meaning to their identities as stepfathers. I sought to understand how the participants' subjective worlds were shaped by their partners, stepchildren, stepchildren's non-resident fathers, and by having children of their own. I sought to maintain a focus on how these social

processes shaped stepfathers' involvement with their stepfamilies, their self-perceptions of being stepfathers, and their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Stepfathers' accounts provided all the historical and biographical data upon which this study was based. Following the approach suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), I sought to analyse stepfathers' accounts, the meanings and values individuals attached to certain activities and interactions. Thus, I sought to maintain the focus 'on drawing out the subjective meanings of [stepfathers'] lived experiences' (Gorell Barnes et al: 1998: 25).

In order to examine stepfathers' involvement more closely, I firstly identified the activities that stepfathers were involved with, such as teaching skills, playing with children, or accompanying them on trips, from the step-fatherhood and fatherhood literature reviewed in Chapter 1. I gained further insight from the stepfathers who responded to the pilot study questionnaires about factors they regarded as constraints, such as non-resident fathers' involvement in step-household issues. As indicated by fatherhood studies, not all fathers are involved with their children in the same way or to the same extent. I anticipated therefore that not all stepfathers would be involved in the same way, nor would they necessarily experience the same issues as other stepfathers. In order to attempt to capture this diversity amongst stepfathers, I proposed to:

- investigate the processes of becoming a stepfather
- identify and examine a number of resources and constraints on stepfathers' involvement
- examine stepfathers' negotiation of care in terms of:
 - making commitments to their stepfamilies
 - taking responsibilities for stepchildren
 - being sensitive to the needs of stepchildren

The research questions that I sought to answer were:

- How do stepfathers care for and care about their stepchildren?
- To what extent has the experience of being fathered shaped stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren?
- Are children from previous relationships a resource or a constraint on stepfathers' commitment to stepchildren?
- Does the birth of a child to stepfathers enhance or diminish their commitment to stepchildren?
- How do stepfathers negotiate with their partners about their involvement with stepchildren?
- How satisfied are stepfathers with their relationships with their partners?
- What and/or who encourages stepfathers to be more actively involved with stepchildren?

2.6 Research design

Previous stepfather research has successfully used a cross-sectional design, often comparing stepfathers with fathers in first-marriage families (see for example, Bray and Berger, 1993a; Kurdek and Fine, 1993; MacDonald and DeMaris, 1995), or to examine differences within stepfamilies (see for example, Fine and Kurdek's (1992) study of adolescent adjustment in stepfamilies; and Ganong and colleagues' study of affinity seeking in stepfamilies (Ganong et al., 1999)). Studies that use cross-sectional designs gather information from their research participants at one point in time. The gathered data are then examined and the presence or absence of relationships or patterns between various variables are sought and identified.

As the literature review indicated (Chapter 1), much previous stepfamily research has tended to focus on a deficit model, and many of the comments provided by stepfathers in the pilot study referred to their dissatisfaction with their stepfather experiences. However, underlying many of these comments were direct references to satisfaction and pleasure derived from being stepfathers, and I was keen to explore these sentiments, in more depth, and from a non-deficit perspective. Therefore, this study was designed to focus on the differences in stepfathers' accounts, of their involvement in stepchild care and activities, and in their commitment to being stepfathers. As a study of stepfathers was still relatively rare, and this study was designed to be exploratory, I concluded that a cross-sectional design would be appropriate to meet the aims of the study. Although the criticisms of cross-sectional studies are duly noted, it would be feasible, and achievable, given the constraints of resources in terms of time, finance, and researcher availability.

2.7 Defining the sample

Obtaining access to stepfamilies in general, and stepfathers in particular, has proved difficult for previous researchers, and this was confirmed by the pilot work on sampling. Whilst exceptions exist (Dunn et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2001), they were resourced in different ways. As my intention was to conduct a small-scale qualitative study, I did not set out to recruit a representative sample. In line with previous small-scale qualitative stepfamily research (see for example Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003), I set out with a purposive sampling strategy. Thus, I sought to obtain a sample of forty stepfathers that included stepfathers from different social class backgrounds, ethnic origins, marital status, residence status, family and stepfamily histories, and biographies. As a sole researcher I was aware that constraints of time and finances would limit the sample diversity and size. The time factor limited the geographical area over which I was able to

travel to meet and interview participants. The financial limitations restricted the size of the sample that I was able to interview. Sample size is relevant in determining the extent to which differences within groups can be examined. I considered that a sample of forty stepfathers would provide a sufficiently large and diverse sample within which I could make useful comparisons. The final sample obtained was thirty-five stepfathers, slightly less than the target of forty.

2.7.1 Defining a stepfather

In order to be eligible to participate in the study, stepfathers had to meet the following specific criteria. Stepfathers had to:

- currently co-reside in a stepfamily household
- have co-resided in a stepfamily household for a continuous period of at least one year, or
- have spent during the previous year, on average, a minimum of four nights per week in the stepfamily household, and
- have at least one co-resident (dependent) stepchild (older than three years and under the age of seventeen, or under nineteen years old and still in full-time education)

2.7.2 Stepfathers' co-residence

In order to exclude and to minimise the impact of relationships in the earliest stages of settling in and adjustment, I decided to limit the sample to stepfathers who had been co-resident or partially co-resident for at least one year. I anticipated that after being co-resident for one year, parenting practices may have begun to be negotiated or would have become established. It is recognised that stepfamilies of longer duration may represent 'successful' stepfamilies, the 'unsuccessful' stepfamilies having dissolved (Smith et al.,

2001), so there is a potential for bias by only including longer duration stepfamilies. However, as the focus of this study was on stepfathers' negotiating roles, commitments and responsibilities, established stepfamilies were also of interest. Although I did not set an upper limit for the length of stepfathers' co-residence, it was limited by the age of the youngest stepchild and would therefore be a maximum of eighteen years.

In order to recognise diversity in living arrangements and to maximise recruitment opportunities, I considered it was important to include men who may not permanently reside within the stepfamily home. I adopted Brand and colleagues' definition of stepfathers 'living with' their stepfamilies as being a situation in which they kept some of their clothes and spent at least four nights per week in their partner's home (Brand et al., 1988).

2.7.3 Stepchild's age

As the major focus of this study was stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren, it was important that stepfathers were living in the same household as stepchildren. Edwards and colleagues described their notion of 'children' for the purposes of their study as 'being of an age that required substantial input in their daily lives' (Edwards et al., 1999b: 22). I sought to minimise the extremes of dependency from those who were potentially almost totally dependent, that is, under three years old, to those who had acquired legal if not practical independence beyond the age of sixteen (or nineteen if still in full-time education). Previous research indicated that pre-adolescent stepchildren were likely to have different involvement requirements to those who were adolescent (see Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Biological fathers become progressively less involved with their own children's activities, closeness declines, and conflict increases during adolescence (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Marsiglio, 1991). And Stewart (2005) concluded that stepfathers' involvement reduced more rapidly during stepchildren's adolescence than that of biological fathers. I considered it would be of value to include, where possible, stepfathers with pre-adolescent and adolescent stepchildren, as the

aim of the study was to examine the processes of stepfathers' involvement with stepchildren. Data were gathered, where possible, on all co-resident or partially resident stepchildren between the ages of three and nineteen.

2.8 Developing the research interview

The semi-structured interview was adopted as a research tool for this study as it provides the opportunity to get close to the subject and encourages them to talk at length about their experiences, and permits researchers to access the 'complexity of stepfamily life' (MacDonald and DeMaris, 2002: 135). The semi-structured interview provides both a consistency with regard to covering the aspects identified as essential to meet the demands of the research design, and at the same time permits sufficient flexibility for participants to discuss their experiences in a more expansive way than is permitted by self-report questionnaires or structured interviews (May, 1997). In this way it was possible to understand that the narratives provided were located within the participants' own contexts, and the discourses were those with which the participants had engaged. As Allan (1991) indicated, this approach enables social researchers to interpret and explain the actions of others through a detailed investigation from within a frame of reference relevant to the subjects of the research.

Jaffe and Miller (1994) cautioned that when researchers engaged in interviewing they should recognise that they too are also participants in the process. Furthermore, through a reflexive engagement with the research process, researchers become more aware of their own 'vested positions and interpretive frameworks' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997: 95). Mauthner and Doucet also explained that data analysis is not a separate aspect of the research process but takes place throughout, and the co-constructed nature of interviewing is based partly on the researcher's initial analytical thinking. During the interview process researchers are,

actively listening to participants' stories, asking questions and leading respondents down certain paths and not others, making decisions about which issues to follow up and which to ignore and choosing where to probe (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 124, emphasis in original).

2.8.1 The research interview: Measures

The interview schedule addressed the following topics:

Household constellation: who the stepfamily members were, their names, ages, and relationships to one another, and any other children who were part of the stepfamily but were not permanently co-resident.

Previous history and personal background: participants family of origin, their relationships with their fathers during their childhood and adolescent years, the types of activities they may have engaged in with their fathers, and the type of work in which participants and their fathers were involved.

Children in the household: participants had the opportunity to talk about stepchildren, their relationships with them, what names were used, and how they related to schools, doctors, and others outside the stepfamily. The extent to which participants were involved with a variety of child-centred activities; eating, talking, reading, playing, educational activities, school visits, sports activities, and other leisure activities, and participants' involvement in discipline and control of stepchildren.

Relationship history with partner, and her personal and work details: participant's partner's relationship history, previous marital status, length of marriage, length of time living as a lone parent, family of origin, current or previous employment, and level of income. Level of support that participants received from their partners with regard to their involvement with child-centred activities, and the extent to which they discussed involvement.

Non-resident father: the role of the non-resident father, the extent of his contact, co-parenting arrangements, financial contributions, how participants felt about non-resident fathers, and how they thought non-resident fathers' roles differed from their roles.

Household activities and child-care: participants' involvement in domestic activities, their financial involvement, contribution to household expenses, and other expenses. Their involvement in child-care tasks such as, baby-sitting, caring for an ill child, making health related appointments, taking a child to these appointments, taking children to and collecting them from their hobbies/sports/activities with friends. Aspects of child-care that they were not involved in, or had been excluded from.

Future plans: participants' short and long-term future, possibilities of the birth of further children, marriage, and adoption.

Review: participants were invited to comment on the interview and to raise any aspects of their experiences that they felt I had missed or had not covered in sufficient detail. It also provided an opportunity to check my notes and to return to earlier topics that may have remained under-developed.

Buehlman et al. (1992) indicated that with this type of interview it is not essential to ask each question in the same order, nor in the same way in every interview. The interviewer encourages the participant to be as expansive as possible, and follows the flow of the conversation while seeking to ensure that all the required sections of the interview schedule are covered.

Probing was used where appropriate to encourage participants to be as expansive as possible. Where I considered they had digressed from their own experiences, they were encouraged to remain focused by the addition of small

questions. Probing was particularly successful in helping to clarify the way that some participants phrased their involvement with certain activities.

In asking stepfathers about their involvement with stepchild-related activities, my focus was to encourage them to describe how they felt about their involvement in these activities, what their involvement offered in terms of stepfather-stepchild relationships, what factors constrained their involvement, and what the outcomes were of their involvement.

Not all stepfather families had the same structure, and in some circumstances certain sections of the interview schedule were not relevant. For example, where stepfathers did not have any children of their own from previous relationships, the section dealing with issues concerning 'own previous children' was omitted. In this way I used the interview schedule as an aide-memoire to ensure that, as a minimum, I covered each aspect of the interview schedule that was relevant to each of the participants.

2.8.2 Other measures: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

The qualitative responses from the pilot questionnaires suggested that many stepfathers were dissatisfied with their current relationships with their partners. The pilot interview study indicated that participants did not respond well to this topic when it was introduced. I therefore concluded that I might have greater success by incorporating a previously validated measure which participants could respond to without having to be involved in a discussion about their spousal relationship if they chose not to. I examined several scales that exist for assessing for example, 'Marital Happiness' (White, 1983), 'Marital Quality' (Crane et al., 1990), or 'Marital State' (Rust et al., 1990).

I decided to use the ten item Dyadic Satisfaction subscale (see Appendix V) of Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) over other similar assessment scales

as it covered aspects of the relationship most relevant to this study. The DAS has adequate psychometric properties: an overall reliability of .96 (Cronbach's alpha) and the internal consistency of the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale is also high at .94 (Cronbach's alpha: based on figures from Spanier, 1976).

Scores for the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale have been reported in a number of studies. Graham et al. (2006) concluded that although scores for internal consistency and reliability were lower than those originally reported by Spanier the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale remains satisfactory for examining relationship satisfaction. The subscale has a range from 0-50; mean scores have been reported in the range 39.0 to 40.8 for married and non-married respondents (see Miller, 1999: 486 for summary). The mean score in this study was 39.6.

2.9 Sampling Procedure: sources of sampling bias

When social science researchers attempt to gather data relating to subjects in hard-to-reach groups, it is often the case that the sample obtained will be inherently biased (Coomber, 1997), and the data obtained can be justifiably criticised on this basis. However, when the measures used in the collection of the data are rigorous and the collection of data systematic (Allan, 1991), and where no attempt is made to generalise beyond the study group, the findings can be informative, and can add to the body of knowledge and understanding of that particular group (Minton and Pasley, 1996).

The methods I employed within this study resulted in a largely self-selected sample. This sample does not represent stepfathers who had chosen not to come forward, and only relates to those who chose to be identified either as stepfathers or men in relationships with women who already had co-resident children from previous relationships, and who had expressed an interest in

taking part in this study. However, as Minton and Pasley (1996) identified, although a self selected, non-representative sample can be problematic, when the study is exploratory, and the results are interpreted as preliminary and with caution, insights can be obtained into hitherto less well understood settings.

2.9.1 Obtaining the interview sample

Following the suggestions of Ribbens and Edwards (2000), I prepared advertisements and notices in such a way as to avoid using the term 'stepfather', and sought men who were, 'currently in a relationship of one year or more with a woman who already had children' (see Appendix VI).

Advertisements, editorials and notices were placed in various weekly publications in different localities around London and south-east England. I chose not to use the national press, as I would not have been able to respond to interested stepfathers from a radius greater than 100 miles from my base in London (See Appendix VII for details of publications used).

Other promotional strategies that I employed were printing A4-sized notices of the advertisement (see Appendix VIII) and distributing them to bus garages and hospitals in the South London area, and a large haulage firm at Heathrow Airport. I also relied upon word of mouth. Colleagues, friends and other acquaintances were asked if they knew of any men who were stepfathers, and if they could pass on information about the research and my contact details. Once I had begun the interviews, I also employed a 'snowball' technique (see Fine et al., 1997; Edwards et al., 1999b), and was invited to participate in a programme on *Radio 5 Live* on the subject of stepfamilies; where the research was promoted.

The most successful means of obtaining participants were the articles placed on the letters pages of newspapers, and advertisements (18/35). Personal contacts and word of mouth referrals produced fourteen participants, while three were obtained through 'snowball' referrals from existing participants.